

Deer Industry News



FRESH!

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COMPLETING A FWFP

Fresh faces

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NEW PEOPLE

Fresh Thinking

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Deer Industry News

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Cover photo: Next Generation attendees by Lynda Gray

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Feeling Fresh

The fresh faces and fresh thinking of the 50-strong Millennial crowd at the annual Next Generation event was just the tonic for me, a sometimes-cynical Baby Boomer. A couple of the presenters said that in their experience the defining characteristics of the successful next generation cohort was a questioning mind and an insatiable curiosity to learn – it was great to observe these traits in abundance among this year's crowd.

From talking with some of those attending I got the message that several are interested but not necessarily sold on the idea of deer farming. I believe the Next Generation event is an important first step in sowing the seeds of deer-related career opportunities, But the question is what could/should we be doing to further entice young people to ensure the succession of our industry? It's a topic this issue covers in 'Flying the flag for deer farming' (page 23).

The counter-balance of Next Generation's fresh thinking is the state of confusion following activation by the Ministry for the Environment of the freshwater farm plan regulations. MfE is telling landowners to come up with a certified plan that sets out a practical way of identifying, managing and reducing the impact of farming on their waterways. It's a fair, reasonable and rationale request and such a plan will provide further proof to our local communities and the overseas consumers of our products of our commitment to responsible environmental management. But what MfE is yet to tell landowners, regional councils and affected primary industry groups is how these plans will be implemented. What exactly should a plan look like? How will a freshwater farm plan align with an existing farm environmental plan? Who are the people qualified to help develop a plan and will there be enough of them available? And the \$64,000 (or should that be \$5000, \$10,000 or more) question – what's it all going to cost a farmer to complete one? These are the big questions and crucial pieces missing from the freshwater jigsaw puzzle. The first plans, from farmers in Southland and Waikato, aren't due for another 18 months. In the interim MfE is promising more practical detail, but shouldn't a lot of that been thought through, discussed and sorted before now? This delay and void in information is divisive; it causes frustration and resentment which unfortunately clouds much of our primary industry presently. In this issue we cover off the freshwater farm planning story to date on (page 16).

A good news freshwater-related story (page 36) are the science-backed results from the five-year DINZ-AgResearch-funded project looking at water quality and stream health on 10 hill- and high-country deer farms around the country. This project in my view has delivered real and meaningful science for farmers. The deer industry will be presenting and explaining the relevance of this data in ongoing freshwater discussions with government regulators and policy makers. In talking with several people around this topic DINZ policy and research manager Emil Murphy said a healthy waterway ecosystem is the beginning and end point of freshwater policy and planning. It's the simple truth and one I believe we're all aspiring to, let's hope we don't get bogged down and washed away with unnecessary and complicated details. ■

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

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Taking the heat off meat

Call out the misinformation around red meat and agriculture. That was the message from MIA chief executive Sirma Karapeeva, National MP Nicola Grigg and Labour List MP Angela Roberts at a Meat Business Women gathering in Wellington.



Changing that negative narrative was covered off by all three when addressing the question of their hopes and aspirations for NZ's red meat industry by 2050 and the role women will play.

"There is a lot of misinformation that doesn't recognise the science-backed truth about red meat and farming," Karapeeva said.

"We need to call out those misguided agendas."

Grigg, spokesperson for a number of National primary-related committees agreed, adding that women could play an important role in influencing that narrative.

"Women already play a massive role in communities and can bring a holistic perspective to the meat industry."

Roberts, a Labour spokesperson on rural services and infrastructure said the ongoing growth of NZ's \$53 billion red meat sector was dependent on moving from a volume to an added value sector and women could play a huge role in driving this.

They hoped a woman would fill the Minister for Primary Industries role well before 2050.

Farm without Harm

Deer farmers are well represented in the 'Half Arsed Stops Here' media campaign aimed at reducing injuries and harm on farm. In the TV ads screened during July DINZ board member Paddy Boyd, NZDFA executive member Mark McCoard and Maniototo deer farmer Becks Smith featured, saying



a few words about staying safe on farm. The campaign is one component of the Farm Without Harm strategy developed by the Agricultural Leaders' Health and Safety Action Group (Safer Farms). The strategy is zoning in on four high harm areas: risks to mental health resulting in reduced wellbeing; harm experienced while working with vehicles and machinery; physical stress and injuries from handling livestock and harm caused by exposure to agricultural chemicals and airborne risks. According to Safer Farms figures, last year 13 farmers lost their lives on NZ farms and more than 2,000 suffered serious injuries that forced them off work for a week or more. Over the coming months, Safer Farms will be sharing more information about the programme. In the meantime farmers are encouraged to sign a pledge, committing to keeping those working on farms healthy and safe, visit: www.farmwithoutaharm.org.nz.

Woolly and warm

Ruanui Station's Andrew Carpenter struts his stuff in a Tussock jumper, the ideal snugly-warm pressie for anyone who works or plays in the great outdoors. It's one of a tight-knit lineup of blankets, throws, beanies, cushions pet blankets made from Ruanui Station's lambswool clip (ruanuistation.co.nz). Andrew's wife Meredith



launched the 100% NZ grown and produced woollen range in 2020 out of frustration with rock-bottom wool prices. Sheep are the bread and butter at Ruanui Station, but deer also play their part and the Carpenters, who host Oniwhiti Training Farm cadets, enjoy teaching them the basics about deer farming (see page 24).

A guiding cause



A fishing and hunting guide is just one of former Southland MP Eric Roy's many loves, including deer farming (see page 14). Every year Roy donates the proceeds from a guided hunting or fishing experience to the Rugby Foundation which supports

players who have sustained permanent injury from the sport. Although he doesn't guarantee a trophy head he tries to cater for the wishes of his clients. It's a win-win all-round - visitors are guaranteed an entertaining and true Southern adventure; the Rugby Foundation gets money to fund activities to support injured players, and Roy gets time out from his regional and national leadership roles. He borrows the words of Muhammad Ali in helping to explain his many years of civic duty: "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth."

Cleansing

Is it an oversized bread bin or a stunted container? No, it's an eClean bioreactor similar to the one that the Hekeao/Hinds Water Enhancement Trust is hoping will help with the removal of nitrates and contaminants from some of the Hinds Plain catchment's



waterways. The trust is waiting for resource consent to trial the new technology which involves three core components - engineered microbiome, a specially designed bioreactor with submersible pump and sensory hardware which collectively function to breakdown and remove water contaminants. Next Generation host farmer Peter Lowe, also chair of the trust talked about catchment projects and what the family is doing to farm within limits (see page 20). ■



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Sarah O'Connell

On Farm Support

Sarah O'Connell, a Next Generation 2023 participant, loves the agriculture industry and has built her career on working alongside farmers to help them achieve their business goals. A proud Cantabrian, she grew up on a small dairy farm and gained valuable sheep, beef and deer sector experience during her university years and in roles which have encompassed rural retail, banking, extension and facilitation. She also has skin in the game, owning a small beef Shorthorn and Angus cattle stud, Carriganes Cattle. O'Connell's first taste of deer (beyond a dinner plate) was working with them on a Canterbury foothills farm and more recently, in Advance Party facilitator roles. In February, she took on a regional On Farm Support role with the Ministry for Primary Industries. It's a new role designed to support and connect farmers with business assistance and offer advice around changing environmental requirements and regulations. Beyond work and cattle farming, O'Connell enjoys hockey, trail running, mountain biking and a bit of adventure racing.

What prompted you to come along to this year's Next Generation event?

I've always been keen to get along to see what it is about and meet young people who are keen on the industry, hear what interests them and what they think the future holds.

What comments do you have about this year's event?

I enjoyed the focus on wapiti/elk, and it was good to see and hear about the differences in red vs wapiti/elk throughout the sessions. The variation in the sessions from on farm experiences to genetic development through to processing and velvetting really highlighted the whole industry and the opportunities available. I learned a lot and had many aspects reaffirmed.

In your opinion, what makes deer farming unique from other farming sectors?

Everything about deer is unique. They are an animal that take specific handling, infrastructure and management. They aren't a species that everyone wants to be involved with, but I have found those in the industry are always very passionate about their deer, whether they are venison or velvet producers.

Can you tell us about your new role with the Ministry for Primary Industries?

The new On Farm Support service is designed to support and connect farmers with the expertise they might need to achieve their business goals, assist with understanding the changing environment regulations and how they might impact their business. The service is free and while not offering specific technical advice we are able to talk with farmers about what they need, when they need it and what resources or who might be best placed to assist them. We are regionally based teams of advisers

all of whom have plenty of industry experience within sectors or regions. Each region has the flexibility to target what is needed the most, when it is required and really focus on the key priorities rather than taking a blanket across the country approach.

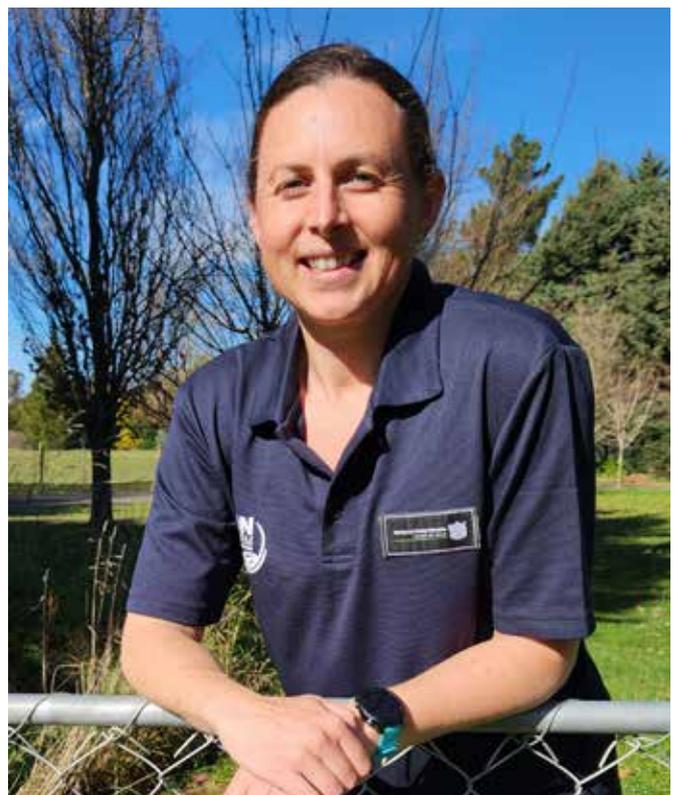
Many farmers are feeling swamped by the requirement for a freshwater farm plan. How can you help them?

We offer a personalised approach, so when a farmer gets in contact with us, we take the time to understand their specific situation and needs. This often involves a farm visit because we realize that farmers really value these face-to-face interactions. Once we understand the specific situation, we are then able to connect them with the information, support, or specialist advice that they may require around FWFP's

What are the first steps farmers should take in the freshwater planning process?

Touch base with your industry support organisation such as DINZ or Beef + Lamb New Zealand, also your regional council because your council will be implementing the freshwater farm plans at a local catchment level. Your local On Farm Support team are also here to support those organisations.

Knowing what specific things to focus on to improve water quality in your area/catchment will be important. Your freshwater farm plan will need to reflect the impact your business is having on water quality, within your catchment. ■



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Provelco changes...

Following a Special Meeting held on March 21, Provelco changed structure from a cooperative to a limited company. The new structure is a better fit for the velvet business in 2023 and beyond, Provelco general manager Ross Chambers says.



LEADER: New Provelco board chair Lorna Humm

“Proactive decisions have been made and actions taken with a strong focus on competitiveness and an evolution of the business model, while remaining committed to delivering well-respected quality velvet to existing and new markets,” he says.

“The board are aware that the farmer-owned option has a responsibility to deliver the best possible service to continue to justify support at a time when there are numerous options available to producers. We also believe that while deer velvet is in demand and is delivering competitive returns to New Zealand producers, it remains a dynamic industry with opportunities and challenges in roughly equal measure.”

As part of the changes, Graeme Sutton retired as chair on July 31 after 12 years of service. Colin Guild will retire by rotation on September 20 following five years of service. Lorna Humm has taken on the role of chair, board members are Guy Williams and Bruce Allan.

...and Winners

Excellent and consistent quality across their 2000kg-plus velvet harvest won Hawke’s Bay farmers Ponty and Matt von Dadelszen the premier Provelco 2022-2023 award.

“The fundamental principle is to acknowledge suppliers that are delivering what our customers want – clean, high yielding, traditional-style velvet,” Ross Chambers says.

The judges of the in-house competition take into account presentation and style, timing of harvest, the percentage of damaged velvet, and percentage of SAP/SAT/AS grades. Matt von Dadelszen says it’s the second or third time they’ve won the award and it was great to again be acknowledged for a job well done.

The family are loyal Provelco supporters – Ponty was an inaugural director of the company formed in 2011.



OUTSTANDING: Ponty and Matt von Dadelszen, with Matt’s son Oscar, are repeat winners of the Provelco commercial velvet award.

Provelco 2022-23 competition winners

Under 500kg	Linden Hunt
500 – 1000kg	Ross & Monique Moore (the Abarta Company)
1000 – 2000kg	Ian & Tom Walker (Kilgaren Farm)
2000kg +	Ponty & Matt von Dadelszen (Mangapurakau Station)
Best Regrowth	Andrew Wellington (Wellington Farms Ltd)
Most Improved	Mark Haynes (Ohinewairua Ltd)

Provelco market Pāmu (Landcorp Farming) velvet and run a separate award category to recognize their achievements.

Landcorp winner	Stuart Farm
Most Improved	Rangitaiki Station

Far Reaching

Deer farming is well represented in a far reaching Otago Regional Council project looking at the likely impact of incoming government-driven freshwater policy and regulation on the province’s land based industries. Information was sourced and contributed by Tony Pearse, Solis Norton, Lindsay Fung, Sara Elmes and reviewed by former NZDFA and DINZ chair John Scurr.

The first part of the report overviews farming and growing in the region to improve the understanding of these production systems ahead of the council’s development of the new Land and Water

Regional Plan. The second part features in depth modelling of various mitigations targeted at meeting freshwater regulations and includes five case study farms with deer. The farms are topographically, geographically and systems diverse, Tony Pearse says, and deer farmers will readily identify with the systems and be able to incorporate the modelling outcomes in management required to meet the regulations with informed choices, realistic assessments of likely costs, benefits and effective changes in farm management.

“The fact that deer farmers and deer farms are so clearly represented in this wider economic project earns them a seat at the table to influence the wider objectives of the Otago project.”

NZ BBQ Week 2023

NZ Venison BBQ Week got off to a great start earlier this month, heralding the start of the Northern Hemisphere game season.



Coordinator DINZ-contracted chef Shannon Campbell reports that foodservice distributors in the north of Germany ran a campaign in each of their mega stores, which saw grills and cool boxes displayed in each of the three main centres.

“Customers had the chance to suggest their best grill ideas and could win a brand-new grill and box of venison treats to BBQ with their friends,” he says.

The UK went “all out” this year with a “truly stupendous event”. Alliance Group organised a fire and smoke event with a group of

Michelin-starred chefs “with plenty of toys from Big Green Egg and a tonne of heat to play with. It was smoking!” he says.

Campbell also teamed up with the Berlin butchery legend and Instagram influencer Sausage Man Never Sleeps (@thesausagemanneversleeps) in Germany for some tasty prizes.

“A social media campaign ran through in-market partners and DINZ own channels gave some lucky people a chance to win their own BBQ packs, including venison sausages made by the legend himself,” says Campbell. A charcoal-fuelled BBQ event crowned off the week at the butchers newly EU-certified butchery.

“Keep the fires burning, we’ll be back for next year,” Campbell promises.

Check out the hashtag #nzvenisonbbqweek on Instagram to see what has been happening.

Border Security



MPI deputy director-general Stuart Anderson and DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat earlier this month signed an Operational Agreement for the development of a collaborative plan to prevent the incursion of deer-specific diseases.

The agreement is primarily aimed at managing the risk of Chronic Wasting Disease entering the country, but also includes the planning of a joint industry and government response to other diseases. ■



Fresh faces for DINZ

Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

After the review of its structure and roles needed for the deer industry earlier this year, Deer Industry NZ (DINZ) disestablished a number of staff positions, reducing costs across the organisation. With its five core functions identified – advocacy, market access and development, research and insights, QA and industry capability and partnering with the NZ Deer Farmers Association – along with the skills needed to fulfil them, DINZ has been recruiting for new staff. Three new appointments joined the DINZ crew recently.



EXTENSION: New DINZ industry capability manager is John Ladley.

New industry capability manager John Ladley, who joined DINZ on 28 August, will be seeding his deep farming knowledge to the team in a newly-defined position, replacing both of DINZ's former QA and farm performance manager roles. This is aimed at ensuring industry has the best skills and knowledge to move into the future.

Moving from Beef + Lamb NZ (B+LNZ), where he has been its general manager South Island for the past five years, Ladley was involved with development of the organisation's farming excellence strategy in 2018-2019. In that role, he was also lead for several projects and groups, including B+LNZ's Farmer Council, the Innovation Farm programme, its Kaikoura post-earthquake farming project, delivery of RMPP's Action Network – that had followed the same principles as the deer industry's Advance Parties – and investments into people and training.

Nelson born and bred, Ladley brings a wealth of commercial and farm extension experience to his new role.

"Passionate about supporting farmers and growers and ensuring organisations can deliver positive outcomes for farmers," throughout his career, Ladley says he most enjoys being able to support and connect people in the rural community.

"It is, after all, the relationships we have within our rural communities that create the success."

He is "looking forward to building my knowledge of the deer industry and supporting it to achieve the goals and aspirations it has in my role as industry capability manager."

New assistant markets manager Virginia Connell is "thrilled" to have joined the DINZ team, in a brand new role, reflecting the changes after the disestablishment of the venison marketing manager, in Wellington on 14 August, she says. Connell will be working on velvet and venison market development and promotions activities and liaising with venison and velvet farmers, processors and marketers. Among other things, she will maintain marketing materials, including DINZ's websites and social media accounts, databases, market analysis and reporting.

It was the possibility of stakeholder engagement that first "tickled her fancy" in the DINZ job, which she expects will "keep her extremely busy." For the 30-year-old, "This role involves a lot of my interests and I'm looking forward to the challenge, especially working with farmers."

No stranger to farm life, the Outdoor Education and Sustainability graduate grew up in Whitianga in the Coromandel on a smallholding with horses, an animal she loves, helping out on dairy farms and with sheep during the holidays. She has also worked on farms with deer, which she found "quite horselike in a lot of ways," and many of her friends stalk deer.

Connell is looking forward to meeting stakeholders around the country in coming months.



THRILLED: New assistant markets manager Virginia Connell is looking forward to meeting stakeholders in coming months.



NEW ROLE: Kathy Goodwin-Ray.

Kathy Goodwin-Ray is DINZ's new Johne's programme manager and will be looking after analysis, interpretation and presentation of data for the disease in the New Zealand deer herd.

Following a review and contraction of the Johne's monitoring service, Goodwin-Ray's part-time position as Johne's programme manager,

replaces full-time DeerPRO manager, Solis Norton who left DINZ earlier in 2023.

A familiar face for many, having worked for DeerPRO over the past 12 years, and also two years prior to that for Johne's Management Ltd (JML), Goodwin-Ray started work on 1 August in her new role.

Starting out as JML's technical manager in 2009, Goodwin-Ray took over a contract from Massey University's EpiCentre in 2010 to provide statistical analysis of Johne's monitoring data and produced the JML quarterly report. She became DeerPRO technical manager in 2018, independently contracted to DINZ, and stepped in as its acting manager in March 2023.

A review of the industry’s needs for Johne’s management had reconfirmed the importance of continuing to monitor and report JD suspect lesions and had defined the scope and job description for the new part-time role, Goodwin-Ray explains. She will be working closely with venison processors, AsureQuality, veterinarians, farmers, Ovis Management Ltd and NAIT to ensure the accuracy and security of the Johne’s monitoring data.

The sheep and beef farmers’ daughter grew up near Geraldine,

“helping out on the farm as much as possible,” before heading off and graduating from Lincoln University with a BAgSc in 1996. After a brief stint as a farm manager, near Timaru, she later gained a Masters and PhD from Massey University, focusing on sheep pneumonia, and subsequently managed a number of Massey University’s deer trials. She has also presented papers at international conferences and published five peer-reviewed papers in scientific journals. ■

New structure for DINZ

Four senior leadership roles now report to chief executive, Innes Moffat:

- Markets manager – Rhys Griffiths
- Policy and research manager – Emil Murphy
- Producer manager – Lindsay Fung
- Industry capability manager – John Ladley

In addition, the following have been reassigned or appointed to new roles:

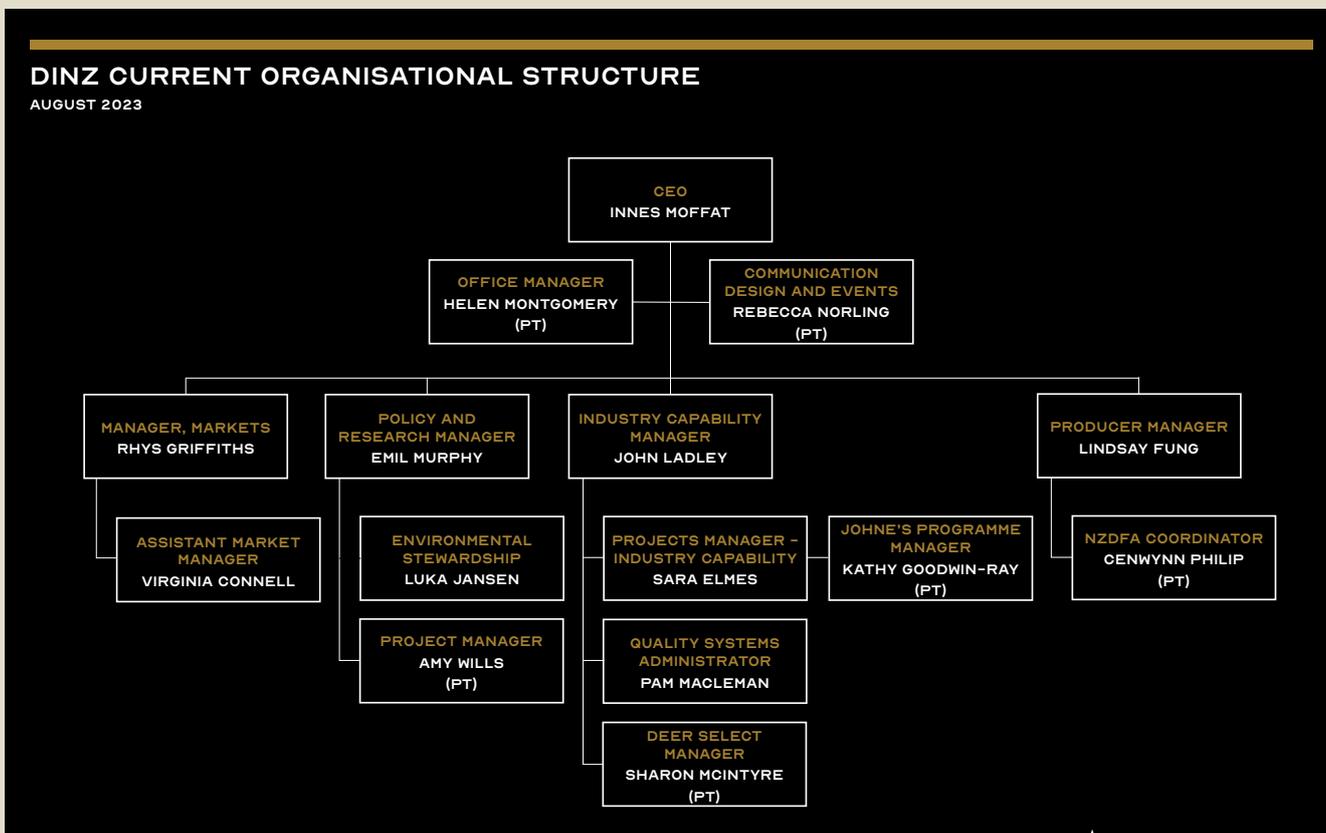
- Assistant market manager – Virginia Connell
- Project manager, industry capability – Sara Elmes has moved from the environmental stewardship role to take charge of DINZ Advance Parties, Environment Groups and to work with farmers on the implementation of farm planning
- Johne’s programme manager – Kathy Goodwin-Ray
- Environmental stewardship manager – Luka Jansen has just been appointed, for a late-September start, and will report directly to the policy and research manager.

DINZ CEO Innes Moffat says the team was sad to bid farewell to Rob Aloe, Solis Norton, Phil McKenzie, Rob Gregory and Nick Taylor and thanked them for their service.

Now, the organisation is “focused on improved systems within DINZ to better use technology for managing projects and communications with deer farmers and the people who influence how we farm deer and market our products,” he says.

While the needed changes “won’t happen overnight,” Moffat is reassuring farmer stakeholders that “we are committed to implementing the changes with minimal or no disruption for you.

“We are determined to do the very best for our deer industry whanau and will work diligently to ensure that these changes will enable us to grow and lead the industry with confidence for you.”



DINZ new organisational structure

The USA: Going from strength to strength for venison

Ali Spencer *Deer Industry News* writer

New Zealand venison now has a solid 'third leg' to its stool, the United States of America, where, just two years after the Passion2Profit-supported pivot to retail, it is now vying with key Continental European markets as New Zealand's primary market. Venison marketers are building on progress made, within the market's new norms.

The USA venison market is "going from strength to strength," reports Shane O'Hara chief executive of The Lamb Company (TLC).

"Growth in our overall venison sales has been exponential over the past few years, with ground, in particular, making significant gains in retail," he says.

The North-American based-based farmer-owned company, partly-owned by Alliance Group, Silver Fern Farms and ANZCO that processes and distributes all of Alliance's and the majority of SFF's venison to customers throughout USA and Canada.



EXPONENTIAL: The Lamb Company's ground venison bricks have been selling well at retail in the US.

That strong retail growth has encouraged TLC's future plans to expand into Canada, where one of its three processing plants is located. Through those sites, the company supplies six of the top 10 North American retailers, with a range of case-ready products. It has launched venison in key market throughout the US.

"Venison is a natural complement to our Raised

Without Antibiotics and 100% grass-fed lamb and beef programmes," explains O'Hara.

"We offer a single source of attribute-backed proteins to retailers whose consumers are increasingly concerned about quality and want to know where and how the meat they buy is raised," he says.

Next month, TLC will be launching a web-based consumer education programme including: venison recipes, cooking tips and tricks, and background information linked by QR code from all product packaging. Messaging will emphasise the nutritional benefits of substituting venison for more traditional red meat proteins.

The statistics show consumer demand for exotic meat has been increasing in the marketplace, notes O'Hara.

"Dollar sales of venison are up 21 percent over the past year, and +773 percent versus three years ago," he notes.

In contrast, local bison meat production ticked up 8.5 percent in

2022 and industry experts predict that there may be a shortage of animals by 2024.

Retail lift achieved through marketing support

The majority of the \$8.9 million (US\$5.3 million) worth of fresh and frozen venison and elk sold in US supermarket chains – just over 50 percent more than two years ago – now comes from New Zealand. Of that, around 40 percent of the fresh venison, is sourced directly from category leader Silver Fern Farms (SFF), and currently goes to around 2,000 stores around the country.



SCALE: Silver Fern Farms' scale makes sense for it to be involved in retail, Matt Luxton says.

"In every [supermarket chain] store that we're in, we outsell bison," reports SFF's strategic programme sales manager Matt Luxton.

The retail lift has only been achieved through marketing support, alongside promotions, to ensure consumers are willing and able to try venison, he says.

SFF also conducted consumer

insights research earlier this year to get better understanding of the customers they are serving.

With its scale, it makes sense for SFF to be involved in retail, rather than foodservice where the level and consistency of demand fluctuates constantly, he says.

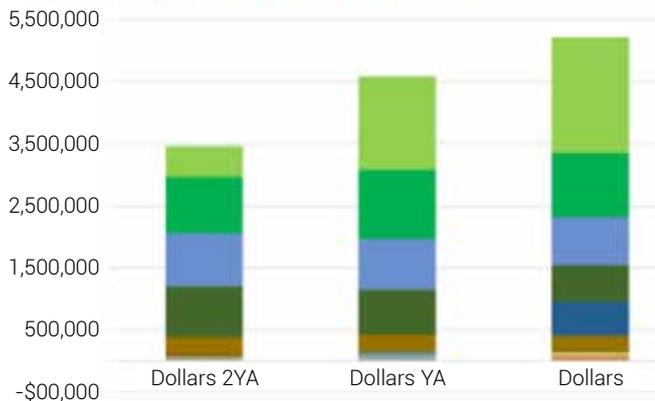
Having venison as part of its protein mix is another advantage for SFF, he feels. "It's a real point of difference, often it's the venison that the retailers are most interested in and will tack lamb and beef on the back of it."

SFF is constantly working on getting activations, "especially in retail where a connection can be made with consumers," explains Luxton.

The team "spends a lot of time and investment encouraging buyers to put the product into the fresh space and then advertising behind it to get awareness."

They also run campaigns educating consumers on "where to buy,

TOTAL US MULO - VENISON/ELK DOLLARS



GROWTH: Venison/elk sales in US supermarket chains have grown from around NZ\$6 million two years ago to NZ\$8.9 million today. SFF is the top light green block.

how to cook” in the social media space and will be taking a stand at the 2024 Expo West retail trade show for natural products in California next March.

Emphasising the USA market for venison is “still very much in its infancy,” Luxton reminds that before the re-pivot, the majority of retailers did not stock the protein and when they did it was in frozen cabinets.

It is still “a very small niche of the meat case,” Luxton says.

“Large retailers, who have previously been extremely hesitant to carry venison, are now able to see its success and have confidence that it will sell. This has allowed other producers from New Zealand to gain traction in the market as well.”

However, in the extremely competitive and aggressive retail market, where venison is often positioned with bison and other



POSITIONING: Retail packs of SFF ground mince and medallion venison cuts currently carry the Pasture-Raised Venison brand. But, a lot of work has been underway with SFF deer farmers to scale-up production for the launch later this year of a wider range of cuts under its 100% Grass-Fed brand.

game meats, Luxton notes marketing is everything.

“We need to elevate New Zealand venison and ensure it aligns with consumer expectations.”

With New Zealand venison’s dominant position in US retail, “There’s lots of room to grow,” Luxton says.

Price and the competitive nature of different providers, “will obviously influence returns to farmers. We shouldn’t be discounting against ourselves. We don’t need to be the cheapest on the shelf.”

It’s been well reported that ground farm-raised venison has been used effectively, to

make in-roads into the USA retail and fast-food restaurants.

The 500g mince ‘bricks’, supplied by all of the venison companies, are now stocked in a raft of upmarket ‘bricks and mortar’ retailers like Whole Foods, H.E.B. Fresh Foods and Sunshine Foods, among others, as well as online.

Ground products from trim going into bricks, burgers and meatballs, make up the bulk of First Light Foods’ venison retail programme in the market, which general manager venison Matt Gibson forecast would grow by 40 percent this year on last year, at the Deer Industry Conference in May.

The shift to ecommerce has been going particularly well. First Light successfully launched its own General Store ecommerce website last year for US customers, with support from the DINZ Marketing Innovation Fund, from which it sells a range of venison and elk cuts.

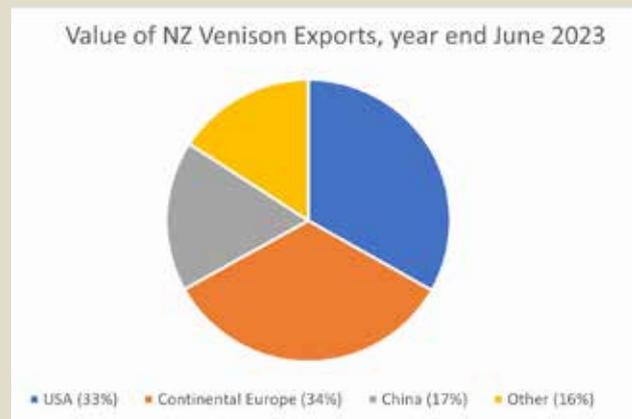
SFF’s website, which offers venison meat boxes and a range of venison cuts, including ground, medallions, a roast and steaks, has also been going “amazingly well”, Luxton says.

“It’s building month on month. And, the parcels of protein going out of the door are being driven by interest in venison.”

To better balance the retail/foodservice ratios, at the time of writing, DINZ and the five venison marketers were still waiting to hear about an application that has been lodged with the Ministry of Primary Industries Sustainable Food & Fibre Fund for a three-year collaborative US retail strategy. With that, more companies are looking into opportunities for the larger Elk/wapiti carcasses that are finding a natural home in the USA. ■

USA vying for NZ venison's top spot

Worth over \$73 million at the end of June 2023, the USA is now vying with Continental Europe as New Zealand venison’s primary market, with each accounting for around a third of New Zealand exports, according to figures from Statistics NZ. This is an increase of 17 percent on last year, in a market which had already risen by 25 percent between 2019-2022.



CHANGING: The market mix for venison at year end June 2023. ‘Other’ includes markets like Scandinavia, the UK, the last of which adds more value to the whole deer carcass and so returns to deer farmers. Source: Deer Industry NZ/Statistics NZ.

Wetlands a win-win

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Three specially constructed wetland areas with bio-filter ponds are ticking the environmental box and also creating a future income stream at Eric Roy's Te Anau farm. The wetlands are a picturesque carbon sink and the base of a developing commercial freshwater crayfish (koura) business.



STICKING WITH DEER: Eric Roy says the income from deer is an insurance when the markets for lamb and beef dip.

Roy, a former Southland National Party MP got to work on wetland establishment soon after buying the 150ha Hillside farm in 2008. There were two drivers; wallowing stags creating run-off, and a desire to follow through with koura farming.

The wetlands comprise dams with a periscope drainage system and spillway that can withstand heavy rain. The importance of having large water holding areas was

highlighted to Roy, who in his role as an Environment Southland councillor has had several discussions around preparedness for dealing with extreme heavy rain events. In his opinion it's the responsibility of every farmer to take action to retain peak flows. But aside from flood control, a well-constructed wetland will sequester carbon and nutrients, and improve water quality, he says.

“We’ve got caught up in carbon credits and it’s become the climate change equivalent of Bitcoin. They’re a tool but not the silver bullet.”

Eric Roy

An indication of the excellent water quality within his own wetland area is the increasing number of koura within the dams. “They’re like a canary in a mine because they only grow and thrive in good conditions.”

Roy’s fledgling aquaculture diversification started four years ago after several years of researching the niche industry, visiting small scale and developing koura businesses in Marlborough and Otago, as well as reading about the successful Scandinavian industry. Although still some years away from reaching a viable commercial enterprise he’s hopeful that the next generation of the family will drive it and supply local and ultimately overseas markets.

Reducing his environmental footprint is a driver for Roy. The wetland development is a good example, as is minimal tillage through direct drilling which is used for pasture and crops. There’s also a registered reserve of remnant native shrubland, and over the coming year beech trees will be planted on a one hectare block.

He’s mindful of farming within environmental limits but critical of how the whole conversation around emissions and offsetting them through carbon credits – largely the planting of pine trees – has played out.

“We’ve acknowledged the problem but not the opportunities and various ways of addressing it with science-backed options. We’ve got caught up in carbon credits and it’s become the climate change equivalent of Bitcoin. They’re a tool but not the silver bullet.”

Velvet and value-adding

Throughout his farming career Roy has looked for value adding



WETLANDS WANTED: Eric Roy says more wetland areas are needed on farms to sequester carbon, filter runoff and improve water quality.

opportunities and diversifications. Koura farming is a good example, and the young cattle targeted at the Angus Pure programme.

He equates a financially viable system back to the amount earned per kilogram of drymatter consumed, the baseline being 18 cents/kilogram because that's what dairy farmers pay for it.

"My driver is to maximise what I can sell the grass for; it's how I judge how I'm going.

The deer system is now financially viable due to the velvet herd of 80 mixed-age stags. They have been the deer focus for the past five years and with the infusion of genetics there's been a half kilo year-on-year velvet weight increase resulting in an across-herd average of 7kgs.

"We'll keep moving up, but I want to keep the heads traditional in style."

Roy is still learning about velvet.

"I'm not an expert but I've found the velvet side of things addictive, because the results of breeding and feeding decisions are directly reflected in what's grown."

The 2022/23 velvet income was up even though the average velvet price was about \$30/kg down on the previous season. He credits the increased velvet weight to the post-rut feeding of crushed barley.

He has an old school way of selecting velvet replacements, using the base circumference of antler in spikers as an indicator of future growth potential. Over three years the circumference measurement of the top performers has increased from 13cm to 18.5cm.

"My reasoning is that those with a higher base measurement should produce heavier velvet."

Roy, the former National Party MP (1993 – 2014) and Deputy Speaker of the House in 2011 is a late-comer to deer farming. He started deer stalking in his teenage years but the opportunity to farm them came along in his early sixties with the buying of the Te Anau farm.

Up until then the family farmed sheep, beef and grazed dairy support stock at Te Tipua in eastern Southland. A 'reset' of the farming business followed Roy's 60th birthday and led to family discussions about farm succession. At that stage none of the Roy's children were keen to go farming. However, Eric wanted to keep farming but in a downsized and less intensive way, and in the Te Anau basin.

"I've fished and hunted in the area since 1955...it's my turangawaewae."

The Southland farm was leased and the Hillside farm near Te Anau bought sight unseen.

Roy explains he was aware of the farm and had expressed interest in viewing it but was told it had sold. When the sale fell through a couple of months later the agent called him to say the tender for the farm was closing the following day. Quick action secured the farm which Roy soon discovered had a ragwort problem.

The farm, roughly one-third each of river flat, hill, and steeper oversown and native country was running a handful of stags, commercial hinds and a small number of elite hinds for AI. The status quo continued for a couple of years, with management and mentoring from experienced deer farmer Terry Cayford. Cattle and sheep were added to help beat back the ragwort and control pasture quality. Pasture was developed and replaced with Shogun ryegrass, red and white clovers on the easier country, and permanent ryegrass and plantain on the steeper areas.

Roy lives in Invercargill and is busy with various governance and leadership roles including chair of Pork Industry NZ and Murihiku Regeneration, a Justice of the Peace and Environment Southland councillor, but makes regular visits to help out on farm at Te Anau. The management of the 120 Ridgedale ewes (described by Eric as "four-wheel drive ragwort eaters"), 120 red hinds, 80 mixed-age velvet stags and Angus cattle including once-bred heifers and progeny is left to retired stock agent Rob Richan. The breeding cows are run on a run-off block at Roxburgh in the Teviot Valley.

Roy says deer are a diversification he'll stick with.

"They're an insurance when sheep and cattle markets dip, it's that diversification thing. I like them, they're suited to the farm and the velvet income helps with cash flow."

For information on Koura farming: <https://keewai.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Koura-Guide-Final-Version.pdf>

For information on how to construct effective treatment wetlands: https://niwa.co.nz/sites/niwa.co.nz/files/import/attachments/NZCW-guide4press_small.pdf



MAKING HEADWAY: A velvet genetic focus over the last five years has lifted year-on-year growth by half a kilogram.



GOOD WEED: The developing koura thrive on oxygen weed (lagarosiphon) and watercress.

The flow-on of freshwater farm plans

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

The information required within a freshwater farm plan (FWFP) is anything but crystal clear. The requirement for a plan is being activated regionally but with little practical detail on how the regulations will be implemented. It's just as well there's an 18-month lead time until the first plans are due from farmers in Southland and Waikato. Meantime the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) is promising more detailed information to assist farmers, consultants, and regional councils. DINZ is staying up with developments and is keen for farmers to get familiar with what's being proposed.



FARMER LED: Sara Elmes says DINZ is taking a farmers-learning-from-farmers approach to freshwater farm planning.

“We want to get farmers on the journey, whether that means updating their farm environment plan or starting from scratch,” DINZ project manager - industry capability Sara Elmes says .

She estimates that about 70% of deer farmers have a farm environment plan meaning they're well on the way to completing the requirements of a FWFP. DINZ will help farmers through

the development of on-the-ground forums and online resources. These will include facilitated workshops to tackle bite-sized chunks of relevant freshwater information. There will also be the opportunity for Advance Parties and environmental groups to access specialist resources. Online support will most likely be along the lines of the farm environment plan pilot programme.

“We're very much focused on the farmers-learning-from-farmers approach.”

Regardless of the support, the prospect of completing a plan has raised the frustration level of many farmers who feel swamped by compliance and box ticking. However, Southland DFA chair Bruce Allan's advice is to get on with it. Allan, also a Fonterra sustainability dairying advisor is well versed in farm environment planning, regulations and compliance and says the theory of a FWFP makes sense.

“We want to get farmers on the journey, whether that means updating their farm environment plan or starting from scratch.”

Sara Elmes

“The farming industry has always supported self-regulation rather than enforced rules and a freshwater farm plan gives you the chance

to identify issues and work out a solution for your particular situation. I think the theory is good but not everyone is of that opinion.”

He adds that there is uncertainty about how the practical details of the FWFP regulations will be implemented, primarily whether there will be enough qualified people to do the work and support farmers, and secondly whether regional councils will work with farmers and rural professionals to address that challenge.

“In a sense we know what we have to do, but we don't have enough clarity on how we're going to get that work done.”

The process has been developed by MfE , but it is the responsibility of regional councils to implement the national regulations as well as any regional requirements. The rationale and backstory to freshwater farm plans is explained in guidance links on MfE's website. Of relevance to farmers is a 40 (!) page document *Developing a freshwater farm plan* explaining what and why. It's a long and confusing read and Sara Elmes' advice is to wait until a simplified guide, promised by MfE, is released.

Rollout and roles

Farmers in Waikato and Southland on 1 August were served notice of their requirement to develop a FWFP. They have 18 months to prepare a certified plan providing “a practical way to identify, manage and reduce the impact of farming on the freshwater environment.”

The websites of Environment Southland and Waikato Regional Council have varying levels of information of the process. Waikato has a helpful FAQ section.

According to the MfE website, the activation order of FWFPs following Waikato and Southland is Otago, West Coast, Horizons, Bay of Plenty, Taranaki, Marlborough, Tasman/Nelson, Greater Wellington, Canterbury, Chatham Islands, Northland, and Auckland. Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti are off the list for the meantime due to the impact of extreme weather in early 2023.

Government-owned assurance scheme provider Assure Quality has the job of training certifiers and auditors. Applications to train as a certifier opened on August 1 and at the end of the month 42 consultants had started the training process, Elmes says. A

“capability shortfall” could be an issue, says Bruce Allan who will undergo certification training as part of his Fonterra role.

DINZ will develop a deer specific module that certifiers could complete, leaving them with an informed understanding of freshwater management on a deer farm, Elmes says. A list of certifiers with deer-specific knowledge could then be included on the DINZ website.

The cost of compliance

Farmers will need to pay for the services of both a certifier and auditor to approve and sign-off their FWFP. A certifier assesses whether the plan meets regulatory requirements and the auditor, who follows up within a year following certification, assesses whether the FWFP action plan is being implemented within the required timeframes. Consultants, certifiers, and auditors will set their own fees. Engaging a consultant to develop a plan may cost \$5000 or significantly more depending on the size and complexity of the farm, Allan says.



DIVISIVE: Southland DFA chair Bruce Allan says the theory behind freshwater farm plans makes sense to him, but not everyone agrees.

“It’s a big lump of money but my view is it’s a capital cost and if you do the plan right the first time it should see you right for the next five to ten years.”

On top of that cost will be renewal of certification every five years and another audit which DINZ has pushed back on as part of a pan-sector letter to MfE.

The unknown cost of compliance concerns Waipa DFA chair Leith Chick.

“There is going to have to be more negotiation around what farmers will be expected to pay and what is a fair price.”

He says farmers in the Waikato will continue fencing off waterways and some are monitoring water quality but from his discussions not many are rushing to develop a FWFP. The complicating factor in the Waikato is Plan Change 1 which is still in arbitration in the Environment Court.

“Whatever happens the outcome will influence freshwater farm plans. In the meantime, everything is in a state of flux and the farmers I’ve spoken to are sitting on their hands and waiting...it will be interesting to see what happens if we get a change of government.”



KEEPING IT FRESH: Andrew Peters (see page 18) recently spent \$35,000 on exclusion fencing and culverts to protect and enhance a waterway on Balquhidder.



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Dazed and confused

A FAQ from farmers, such as Andrew Peters, is whether an existing farm environment plan will meet the requirements of a FWFP. In short, no it won't, but it will reduce the work needed. MfE say they are working with "sector farm environment plan providers to develop an effective approach," adding that "for a farm plan to be considered a freshwater farm plan it must include the minimum content requirements as certified by a freshwater farm plan certifier." What this means in plain English is difficult to say.

Peters says he's confused and frustrated about the need for a new plan when most of the information is likely in the Horizons Whole Farm Plan completed in 2015.

"I'm probably like a lot of farmers, it's at the stage where the very mention of the word 'plan' immediately makes me switch off."

"For us, making money from the livestock we farm and incorporating that with plantings and fencing that will protect and enhance waterways and the environment is a win-win."

Andrew Peters



CONFUSED: Andrew Peters says clearer information on how a freshwater farm plan will link in with his whole farm plan is needed.

He won't be embarking on any freshwater farm plan until there is some "common sense" around the discussion and a clearer understanding of how it will dovetail with his own farm plan.

Although holding back on a FWFP, Peters continues to push ahead with projects to protect and enhance the waterways on Balquhidder, comprising 430ha of medium to steep hill-country near Taihape. The latest is \$35,000 of riparian fencing and installation of three culverts to protect a permanent stream. The area will be planted out with native species over coming months.

"We could see the benefit purely from a water quality point of view and once planted it will be a nice looking piece of bush. For us making money from the livestock we farm and incorporating that with plantings and fencing that will protect and enhance waterways and the environment is a win-win."

Peters, chair of the OTaihape, Pukenua catchment group says water testing across the catchment over the last three years highlights the variation of results.

"We're into our fourth year of testing and the only pattern is the inconsistency of results within and between seasons. It proves the dynamic nature of water quality, and the government needs to understand this."

He points out that the deer industry was one of the first pastoral sectors to promote responsible environmental stewardship, the stellar example the environmental awards programme started in 2001.

"We have the practical knowledge, examples and experience of those past winners which has been widely shared over the years and has included water quality practices. What we've achieved as an industry needs to be highlighted to regulators and policy makers." ■

FWFP: where to start

1. Plan to plan

Read online or contact direct your regional council to find out what will be required.

Refer to the DINZ website www.deernz.org over coming months for updates and next step information.

2. Connect

Check in with a local catchment group and neighbouring farmers to see what they are doing. Make contact with your existing advisor or an MPI On Farm Support team (see Page 6).

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Turning the tide on nutrient losses

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Farming under Environment Canterbury's Sub Regional Plan has put a bottom line on the Lowe family's mixed cropping and livestock system at Hinds.

"It means no land use change or further irrigation. We farm according to our farm environment plan and have to show that we're reducing our nitrate levels," Peter Lowe explained to the Next Generation gathering on the first morning of the 2023 event.

The Lowes – Peter, wife Diane and son Thomas – run a 292ha irrigated mixed farming system. The base line nutrient loss, based on Overseer calculations in their audited farm environment plan, is 36kg N/ha. They are required to reduce losses by 36% following a three-stage process by 2035. The farm's nutrient loss figure was considerably less than other enterprises in the catchment, but they were taking several steps to further peg back losses, Lowe said. This included soil moisture monitoring to ensure irrigation efficiency, reduction of nitrogen fertiliser to crops and none to pasture. On the deer side that had meant using genetics to improve hind performance.

Hybrid breeding and weaner finishing was one strand of the farming business which also included a Romney sheep stud, Halfbred breeding and finishing, dairy heifer grazing, barley and seed potato production. Hybrid weaners were a good fit in the

overall system because they achieved weight targets and were offloaded within a year. In 2022 carcass weight averages from first and second drafts were 74.5kg and 70.1kg. The 2022/23 September to January average was 73kg.

The Lowes are required to reduce nitrate losses from 36 to 23kg N/ha by 2035.

"We were pleased with that given the grass, balage and barley system we have," Diane said.

In a 2022 trial, one-third of weaners were sold into Mountain River's USA elk meat programme. On the kill date of January 6 the carcass weight averages were 74.1kg for the 30 R1 hinds, and 81.7kg for the 10 R1 stags.

"We were a bit unsure how the elk programme would work for us with limited paddock space available due to the fawning of the mixed-age hinds, but we found it worked with a bit of extra fencing."

It had a cashflow effect with payment delayed from September and October until January but that was offset by the estimated \$150 per head premium.



POSITIVE ACTION: Peter Lowe, with Diane and twin grandsons Flynn and Henry, says landowners across the Hinds plains were implementing technologies and projects to protect waterways.

Catchment Action

Peter Lowe is chair of the Hekeao/Hinds Water Enhancement Trust, a community-led group taking steps to enhance water quality within the highly productive irrigated dairying, dairy grazing, arable and livestock breeding and finishing catchment.

Environment Canterbury (ECan) has identified nitrate reduction as a key priority in its sub regional plan for the Hinds Plain area. HHWET has the responsibility to achieve around half of the required catchment N-loss reduction which is taking the pressure off individual farm owners who would otherwise have to reduce on farm losses by 48% rather than 36%.

ECan is targeting nitrate level reductions in groundwater and from the Hinds River to 6.9mg/L and 3.8 mg/L respectively. The trust is trialing and implementing several complementary tools and projects to meet the targets, Lowe told the Next Generation crowd. These included a managed aquifer recharge, near river recharge, targeted stream augmentation, irrigation nutrient recycling, constructed wetlands, and bioreactors.

The 120 – 130 red-wapiti hinds are run on 40ha of deer fenced and irrigated land. The breeding herd is topped up each year with about 20 bought-in first calvers from the Carran family near Te

Anau. All hinds are mated to wapiti bulls from Edendale Station. About 110 weaners are contract supplied annually to Mountain River Processors. ■



GOOD FIT: Hybrid weaner finishing fits in well in the Lowe's mixed cropping and livestock system at Hinds. The 2022/23 weaner carcass average weight was 73kg.

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Next Generation

Broad and relevant

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Farming pathways, elk and wapiti, and deer farming within environmental limits and under irrigation were the broad topics of discussion at this year's Next Generation event in Mid Canterbury.

The goal of the annual get-together is to connect, inspire and inform the under-35s about deer farming and judging by the feedback and banter, this year's event delivered on all fronts.



GOOD SUPPORT: Justin Stevens said the rapid uptake every year of Next Generation spaces proves the need for such an event.

"I was really impressed with the engagement of this year's attendees," NZDFA chair Justin Stevens said.

The annual muster is a key funding NZDFA priority with about \$10,000 allocated each year for running costs. The rapid uptake of the 50 spaces is testament to the importance and need for such a forum, Stevens said.

This year's event was supported by members of

the Elk & Wapiti Society who arranged the first morning's visit to the Lowe family's mixed farming business (page 20). The crowd, drafted into smaller groups, moved around three stations to hear about parasite management, reproduction, and shed handling. Although the information was elk/wapiti-slanted it was relevant to most deer management systems.

On the second farm visit to 668ha Mountain River-owned Northbank Station on day two, farm manager Adam Waite gave



JUGGLING ACT: Northbank farm manager Adam Waite (left) and Mountain River deer supply manager Rob Millar (right) explained the challenges of supplying weaners within the time and weight requirements of the processing plant.

a mind-bending account of managing velvet stags along with finishing 600 Angus steers and 5400 red and hybrid weaners in an intense irrigated system to meet the processing requirements of the adjacent Mountain River processing plant.

"It's a juggling act and a bit like solving a Rubik's cube at times," he said.

Mountain River deer supply manager Rob Millar said they targeted a time frame for processing as much as a

carcass weight. They bought in weaners from several suppliers from March, targeted a 60kgCW average and a \$200 margin.

The Next Generation contingent then travelled to the nearby Dunsandel Community Centre and heard about the post-processing Mountain River story from marketing manager John Sadler. He talked about the specially developed elk/wapiti cuts for both the US and Swiss markets. Switzerland was a high-end market that demanded genetically proven wapiti cuts. Some cuts selling at retail for \$90 - \$190/kg.



ELK-INFUSED: Elk & Wapiti Society president Grant Hasse and members informed the Next Generation participations about various aspects of elk/wapiti management.

"I was really impressed with the engagement of this year's attendees."

Justin Stevens

DeerSelect's Sharon McIntyre gave some valuable pointers on how to use breed values for venison production gain. The formula was simple enough: measured performance = genetics + environment but getting the right sized genetics for a particular system required homework to get the animal with the best numbers. AgResearch scientist and NZDFA executive member Jamie Ward's advice was to use Deer Hub online tools and to talk with breeders before making genetic decisions. He said the breeding effects of a bad maternal decision could linger in a herd for 20 years.



CUT ON TIME: Provelco's Daniel Jenkins said knowing when to cut was the key to maximising velvet quality and returns.

Venison marketing and genetics was balanced by Provelco general manager Ross Chambers who explained the competitive and complicated area of velvet marketing, especially in China where 70% of velvet is exported, but one-third is reexported on to Korea. There were lots of questions about market prospects in China and Korea, and also about the different grades which Provelco buyer Daniel

Jenkins explained. He said the harvesting of velvet and vegetables was similar when it came to maximising quality.

"Cut on time so you can maximise returns. Big is good but if you push the animal too much you might miss out on a higher paying grade."

The final presenter, Coleridge Downs program manager Kristen O'Callaghan, talked about cadet training within the Rakaia Gorge farming business owned by the Erdman family from Hawaii. The wider Coleridge Downs operation encompassed 10,000ha and 19 staff across four farms (three in the Rakaia Gorge and the other in the Waimakariri Valley). It was a "good news overseas investment story", O'Callaghan said, with the Erdman family fully supportive of the cadet training scheme which included deer farming experience. ■

Flying the flag for deer farming

Lynda Gray *Deer Industry News* editor

Full credit to the NZDFA for 11 years of sharing and showcasing the deer industry to the next generation. The upbeat enthusiasm of this year's participants was obvious. Also obvious from comments made by several speakers is the shortage of young people entering the industry. What other training and mentoring could be or should be happening to ensure succession across the deer farming industry?

NZDFA chair Justin Stevens believes it's the responsibility of deer farmers to invest the time in attracting and training the next generation of deer farmers.

"Who else can give them that experience other than deer farmers?" he asks.

"I believe it's up to all deer farmers if they are given the opportunity to look and see how they can help the next generation into farming."

The Stevens family have employed numerous young people over the past 17 years, eight of which had no prior farming experience.

"All deer farmers have been taught or trained by someone who has taken the time to help and teach. It's up to us all, no matter how busy we think we might be, to give something back and share the knowledge and insights that we have gained."

Luckily, there are farmers such as Stevens' prepared to step forward and teach the basics. Also, there are training farms which include deer handling as part of practical experience. At Otiwhiti Station, a Land Based Training farm at Hunterville, the annual intake of 18 cadets gets hands-on training while studying for L3 and L4 NZ Certificate in Agriculture qualifications. They get the basics of working with deer at Ruanui Station, one of Otiwhiti's nine farming partners. Ruanui Station is the only farm with deer and Otiwhiti manager Charlie Duncan says he'd be open to including other deer farms.

"It's important we expose our cadets to all types of farming and

how much deer farming they get is dependent on when they're rostered at Ruanui so yes, we probably could do with more deer farming contacts."



CRUCIAL CARE: Kristin O'Callaghan says regardless of the farming sector it's the "pastoral care" that dictates how long and how far a young person progresses in the industry.

In the South Island Coleridge Downs offers four school leaver placements each year for a two year cadetship of practical farming and study towards ITO qualifications. At the Next Generation event programme manager and inhouse ITO trainer Kristen O'Callaghan said all cadets get practical deer farming experience at the Coleridge Downs farm through the routine handling and management of 1400 MA and replacement hinds plus

weaners. Some find the deer a bit of a challenge to start with but enjoy the experience.

"They're well supported when they work with them and working as part of a team helps," O'Callaghan says. Second year experience is targeted to the special interest areas of the cadets and although none have specifically asked for more deer experience, it would be possible to arrange.

From her experience there is no shortage of young people wanting to enter the farming industry.

"It's more about the gap between what farmers are wanting and the ability of those wanting to enter the industry, hence why training is so crucially important. What would really help is if more farmers would come and have a look at our systems and reproduce what we are doing here within their own operations."

She emphasises the importance of "pastoral care" no matter what sector of the industry young people start in.

"This support dictates how long these young people will stay, and how far they progress in the industry. We also know that a young person who is passionate about the industry, well trained and supported will see the benefits of all stock classes including deer."

Same but different.



LET'S TALK: Olivia Weatherburn says there could be an opportunity to adapt and extend the B+LNZ Generation Next programme for deer farmers.

There could be potential to build on NZDFA's Next Generation event by linking in somehow with Beef+Lamb NZ's similarly named Generation Next. That's the opinion of B+LNZ's Olivia Weatherburn who instigated and oversees their levy-funded programme. The region-based four to six month programme involves three practical workshops and an online webinar. The topics covered are applicable



REWARDING: Andrew and Meredith Carpenter say that observing how Otiwhiti cadets develop and grow during their time at Ruanui Station is hugely rewarding.



ALL GOOD: After some initial hesitation Otiwhiti cadet Briar Beals (19) says she now enjoys dealing with Ruanui Station deer.

Ruanui Station

Ruanui Station owners Meredith and Andrew Carpenter are farming partners with Land Based Training’s Otiwhiti Station, paying an annual subscription in return for weekly help from a cadet. They also employ a graduate cadet each year.

“We find it hugely rewarding,” Meredith says.

“They arrive as school leavers often green and with no farming background and it’s great to see them grow and develop.”

Ruanui’s manager, Jeremy Mallalieu enjoys mentoring the cadets in deer management and handling. He has a genuine interest in deer, running 280 hinds and a few stags on recently bought land.



KEY PEOPLE: Experienced deer farming mentors such as Ruanui Station manager Jeremy Mallalieu are crucial in encouraging the next generation of deer farmers.

Ruanui is the only farm where Otiwhiti cadets get to work with deer. Most enjoy the experience and after a couple of days have gained in confidence and picked up the skills to work with deer.

Although the majority of Ruanui income is from the 14,000 Romney ewe flock and 900 Angus cow breeding cow herd, the progeny from the 550 hinds contributes about 5% from the sale of store and finished weaners.

Andrew’s interest in deer stemmed from hunting and led to the introduction of a few “feisty hinds” in the mid-1980s.” The herd grew with the introduction of hinds from all over the country, peaking at around 1000 hinds during the mid-1990’s but had reduced back to 550 hinds.

“We find that number fits in well with the ewes and cattle, he says.

The management has pulled back from a fast growth early spring market emphasis to fit in better with Ruanui’s feed growth curve.

“If we can meet that (early) market that’s good, otherwise our goal is to finish them before the second winter.”

The Carpenters used to sell most of their weaners as stores at the Taihape weaner sale and privately. This year for the first time 260 mixed sex weaners were wintered on grass and silage on a deer fenced block at Marton; the best hinds will be brought back to Ruanui as replacements and the rest finished to prime weight.

to any red meat farming business: understanding financial basics and management; developing better decision-making skills; understanding technology and genetics; managing mental health and wellbeing; and understanding the overall goals and aims of the industry. Participants share their goals and aspirations and regularly revisit these. Weatherburn believes there is an opportunity for B+LNZ and the deer industry to collaborate on tweaking the course for deer farmers.

“We have a set programme, and everything covered is relevant to sheep, beef or deer farmers but perhaps it could be adjusted to include some more deer specific content ...there’s potentially an opportunity to build your capability.” ■

On point

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

A pathways into deer farming session at this year's Next Generation was on point judging by the questions and discussions following three presentations on the first afternoon.

ANZ bankers Ben Early and Tim Stocker talked about how banks assess a prospective Agri-loan client, and the business and financial credentials a young person needed when approaching a bank. Early explained his job was to back motivated, young people so long as they had a viable business, sufficient security, and a team of supporting people behind them.

"We're always on the lookout for good young people to invest in, because they're the future of farming."

Stocker explained and pushed the importance of financial leverage – growing an asset base to borrow against. Fergus Wakelin, another speaker, walked the talk explaining how he had leveraged his way into deer farming through contracting, farm leasing and sheer hard work.



SMART WORK: Fergus Wakelin had worked hard and smart to grow his asset base and buy a farm.

"I've done a heap of different things to get where I am," he said.

Growing up on a sheep and beef farm in Canterbury, Wakelin got the deer farming bug at a young age from watching videos on live deer recovery. Following practical farm work on leaving school he started a contracting business which over the years had

included harvesting, direct drilling and silage making. He had also leased land for cropping, lamb finishing and dairy grazing.

Ten years ago, he bought 55ha at Cavendish, Mt Somers and after some minimal subdivision started cattle trading and dairy grazing. At the same time, he started collecting deer farming plant and fencing materials. He also met and married his wife Lisa, an Air New Zealand pilot. In 2018 the first 3ha was deer fenced for the first six hinds. The system was initially venison focussed but Wakelin decided that velvet held more appeal and had grown the herd largely with second-tier velvet stags.

Aside from smart leveraging he had an insatiable curiosity and the ability to "do things", a good example of both was the follow through after Googling on how to build and adapt a second-hand deer shed and set of yards.

Wakelin's plan was to buy more hill country to increase the breeding herd so he could genetically select and advance the velvet business. In hindsight, the "piecemeal approach" to deer farming

was messy and borrowing all the money and buying a velvet herd upfront would have been ideal but was easier said than done without equity.

It didn't matter how much money you had, the important thing was to get it working for you, he said.



OPEN MINDED: Rooney Farms deer farm manager Jamie Lamb said keeping an open mind about the location and type of management roles had helped progress his farm management career.

Rooney Farms deer managers Jamie and Lee Lamb talked about their experience of farm management roles since. Jamie, with assistance from Lee, managed for Rooney Farms Whiterock Station and the next door Stew Point Station in the Rangitata Gorge.

He got valuable farming experience through shepherding jobs, which progressed on to stock management and eventually farm manager roles. That had

meant taking a gamble at times on the type of role or location. An example was a job he was initially reluctant to take because it was in Southland, but it had turned out to be hugely fulfilling.

"When you're looking for a job don't let your preconceptions get in the way," he said.

The Lambs stayed in that role for five-and-a-half years then tried to "milk their way" into farm ownership in by working on a dairy farm.

"We took the chance and gave it a shot, but it wasn't for us," Jamie said.

It was then they grabbed the opportunity of a deer farm management position near Wanaka where they stayed for five years before applying for the Rooney Farms position. They managed the farms as if they owned them and enjoyed the autonomy although sometimes had to compromise plans to fit in with company management.

They had sidelined the goal of farm ownership targeting instead debt-free lifestyle block ownership. However, an equity partnership in a deer farm was appealing but not something they were actively pursuing in the meantime because they were happy where they were. Their advice to aspiring farm managers was to do the necessary homework before accepting a role and to stay the right amount of time to build credibility and skills.

"If someone doesn't last more than a year it's a red flag but, on the flipside, you have to be on the lookout for opportunities to get you to the next step." ■



NZDFA Executive Committee: Chair Justin Stevens, Jamie Ward, Mark McCoard, Karen Middelberg

Team effort tackles post-Gabrielle management

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News*, editor

How to succeed at weaning was the topic of a planned but abandoned (thanks Cyclone Gabrielle) Hawke's Bay DFA workshop. However, the topic was revisited and tackled in the cyclone aftermath by the DFA and local vets. The FAQs post-Gabrielle fell into the two broad categories of weaning and mating, vet Camille Flack says.

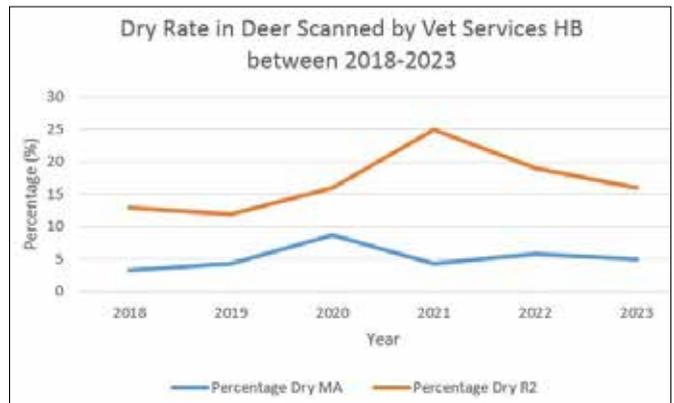
“The questions we received about weaning were firstly about whether to pre- or post-rut wean, and what post-rut management would look like in a system that usually pre-rut weans,” she says.

Another post-rut weaning question was what fawn treatments might be necessary before mating. Those that could still pre-rut wean then wanted to know the essentials for fawns to reduce the shed time at weaning.

The wipeout and damage of fences on many farms changed mating management on most farms.

“Infrastructure damage meant farmers had limited choice on where to put hinds over mating,” Flack explains.

That led to questions around the management of bigger mobs such as the pros and cons of single versus multi-sire mating, and how many stags to use in a multi-sire mating scenario.



DOWN BUT NOT OUT: Despite the disruptions, the 2023 dry rate of MA and R2 hinds was not significantly up on the previous year.



CATCH UP: Informal get-togethers gave cyclone-affected farmers much needed time-out.

“One saving grace post-cyclone was the ample feed on offer in autumn. It meant that hinds were in good order and mated well so long as the hinds and stags stayed together!”

“One saving grace post-cyclone was the ample feed on offer in autumn. It meant that hinds were in good order and mated well so long as the hinds and stags stayed together!”

Camille Flack

The need for scanning this year was equally as important as in a drought year but due to the issues at mating time it simply wasn't possible in a lot of situations, she says. Not surprisingly the results for the region showed that fewer deer were scanned. On the plus side the dry rate of hinds was on par with 2022.

In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, Hawke's Bay Advance Party facilitators Flack, Anyika Scotland, and Richard Hilson

stayed in communication with deer farmers via phone and/or email. A few months down the track social gatherings were held.

“Anyika's group had a catch up, clay bird shoot and dinner which was a good chance for farmers to ‘chew the fat’ and chill out. My group met in April for a catch up, we had lunch together and went for a drive around a member's farm in Eskdale.”

Flack, who farms with her partner and two young children Ted and Travis, says deer farmers in the region are enormously grateful for the help and assistance from throughout the country.

“From the people that turned up soon after the cyclone to help with fencing relief, to DINZ for helping with fence supplies and the NZDFA for organising the online auction and coordinating the distribution of fence posts from South Island contributors, and the local DFA branch effort in managing the organisation of fencers, equipment, knowledge, advice, and support. It has been greatly received and appreciated. Words cannot express what this has meant to so many, but three words are a start – thank you all.” ■

Driving Force

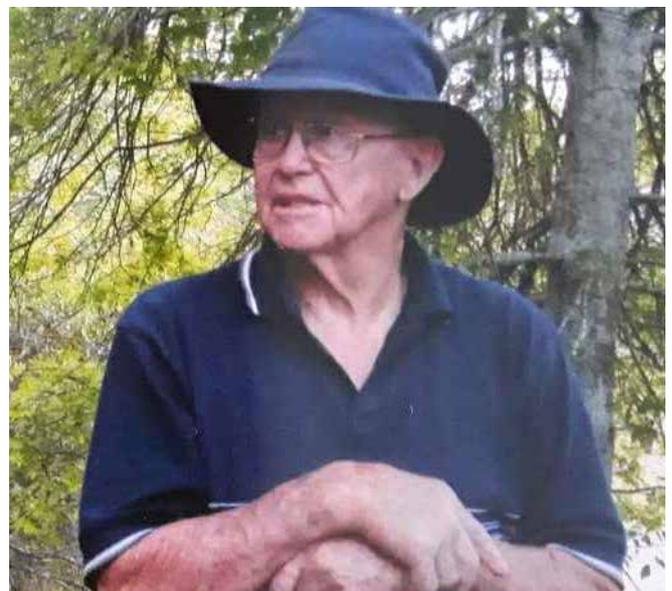
Murray Powell's wisdom and wonderful tales are fondly remembered by central North Island deer farmers. Waikato DFA branch chair Catherine Morrow said his contribution to the deer industry and wildlife conservation was unparalleled when advising the news of his death to the deer industry on 7 August.

Powell was a founding member of the Waikato DFA, and a driving force behind the ‘Deer Country’ section at the National Fieldays during the 1980s. The group of about 70, self-funded and constructed the displays and Powell recalled during an interview for ‘In Hindsight, 50 years of deer farming in New Zealand’ that their efforts gave the industry a huge profile.

“We had sub-branches that helped us out, and the displays showed the unitedness of deer farmers at the time.” He added that what was purpose-built for the exhibition space was sold afterwards. “We were one of the most profitable branches in the country,” he said.

The citation in the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2020 in which Murray was appointed Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit encapsulates his services to wildlife conservation and the deer industry, in particular establishment of the Hilldale Zoo and Wildlife Park in 1969, now the Hamilton Zoo and driving force efforts in development of deer farming in the Waikato region. He was a founding member of the Waikato DFA branch and his longstanding contribution was recognised with Life Membership.

A memorial service is planned for Murray in mid-September. ■



MOVER & SHAKER: Murray Powell was a driving force and founding member of the Waikato DFA branch.



Justin Stevens, NZDFA Executive Chair
jrstevens@actrix.co.nz

What motivates us to farm deer?

Trevor Walton, *Deer Industry News* writer

Successful venison producer David Baker is trying to make sense of the business of farming – a calling that's as much about head as it is about heart. He is reflecting on where his farming journey is heading. As an analytical thinker he's wrestling with the major issues now facing hill-country farmers.

He loves farming. He loves his deer. But his rational brain looks at the challenges farmers face and asks whether it's worth it. His 15-year-old eldest daughter is keen to become a farmer – and he wonders whether this would be a good idea.

"I'm not anti-farming, but I'll be encouraging her to get the skills to do something else. Once she's done that, she can come back to the farm, if that's what she still wants. The farm won't be going anywhere."

Then the heart takes over, "If all three daughters decided they wanted to be farmers, I guess we'd raise the finance to make it happen. Personally, I've looked at greener pastures elsewhere, but I'm still here."

As a youngster, farming was all that David had wanted to do. Upon graduating from Lincoln University, with a B Ag Com, he returned to the family farm, with fellow graduate and wife Emma. His father Iles was eager to move on and Baker was impatient to put his Lincoln knowledge into practice.

It was a very different world to the one in which the Bakers now find themselves. In 2000, water quality concerns were not a thing on hill country farms. Increases in productivity were an almost certain path to greater profit. Skilled farm labour was relatively easy to come by.

Today, production costs are rising rapidly at a time when

product prices are either weakening or, in the case of venison, below previous peaks. To manage the cost-price squeeze, Baker has changed his original management focus from maximising productivity, to getting the best bang from his input bucks.

The Bakers' 800 hectare home property (750ha effective) is at the top of the Tomogalak Valley, not far from Balfour. It's medium rolling to steep country, with bony hills that climb to 550 metres.

There's little growth on the hills for two months in the summer dry and the winters are usually more than 100 days. Slow growth in the spring means Baker has ruled out running a velvetting mob.

"I'm now running what I call a low-input system. I'm undoubtedly sacrificing some productivity, but I'm optimising my returns," Baker says.

Weaner deer are finished on improved pastures on the farm's gentler slopes. Lambs and steers are finished on a 250ha irrigated farm at Riversdale, where his parents live. The Riversdale farm also produces lucerne balage to provide protein to young stock being wintered on fodder beet.

The farm business has multiple income streams, with deer, alongside sheep, beef and dairy grazers reducing market risk. During the Covid years their contributions to farm income were sheep 33%, cattle 25%, 22% deer and 20% dairy grazers. But not



GREY DAY: A typical Southland winter's day. The easy country in the foreground has a successful three-pond sediment trap. Yearling hinds are on swedes in the background.

this year. All income streams are heading south, except for venison and dairy grazers, which will be keeping the show on the road.

During the Covid years the contributions to farm income were sheep 33%, cattle 25%, 22% deer and 20% dairy grazers. But not this year. All income streams are heading south, except for venison and dairy grazers, which will be keeping the show on the road.

Baker says that over the last 20 years ewes and lambs would on average have been more profitable than terminal venison production. But no year is 'average'. Venison prices are often

countercyclical to lamb and beef. Deer are also easy-care, which is important, when it is so hard to get good farm labour.

“The seasonal work demands of each of the stock classes fit together well. You don't get big overlaps. The only downside is that you never get a break from work; there's always something that needs to be done.”

The pasture demand curve for venison fits well with the ewes and lambs.

“In spring the young stags go off to the works which then gives us flexibility with the other stock classes. We can move some ewes and lambs into the deer block if they are short of grass or shut paddocks up for balage” he says.

Another reason he has stuck with deer is that fascination factor.

The answer lies in the soil

David Baker sees healthy soil as the key to profitable livestock farming. He argues that without a healthy soil, your pastures and the stock that graze them will be less productive.

He carries a spade with him in the four-wheeler and digs a hole in new pasture, looking for earthworms; a crumbly soil structure; and a deep root zone. During Lincoln studies Baker was steeped in the virtues of applying superphosphate. Lots of it.

“But when I came home, I found the Olsen levels on the hills were only 15-20 when, based on the super Dad had been applying, they should have been around 30. There appeared to be very little life in the soil. Our animal health costs were high. Something didn't add up.

After a fair bit of trial and error, including a period when he 'mined' the P reserves his father had applied, Baker has settled on what he calls a more natural fertiliser regime. Combined with a reduction in capital stock numbers but enhanced performance and an emphasis on quality, rather than quantity, the farm is ticking over nicely.

He's now taking a more biological approach to the management of his soils. This means he puts as much emphasis on the micro nutrients and biological activity in the soil as on its main mineral content. P reserves are slowly rebuilding. The soil is now healthier and full of life.

“Animal health costs are down, and stock growth rates are excellent,” he says.

To get a better gauge of P levels, he now regularly gets resin P tests. These give a much better indication of the P that is available to plants if soil biology is doing its job. The traditional Olsen test doesn't pick up natural P sources like RPR, especially in low-pH hill country pastures. He also gets annual herbage tests done to compare with the soil tests and make sure the plant and animals are getting what they need.

“I prefer not to use water-soluble super, but I'll use it in some areas if P levels are too low and for growing brassica crops. Otherwise, we use dicalcic phosphate and reactive phosphate rock or guano. These are pH neutral and slow release. That's good for soil life,” Baker explains.

“I've also tried humates and use fish products. The fish products

from Bio-Active Soils definitely improve growth rates of finishing stock as it increases the nutrient density of the plant. They also have a biofish N product and results are similar to applying synthetic urea (N) but with significantly less N loss by evaporation or leaching.”

On the 400ha of hills, he aims to maintain resin P levels between 40 and 50. Some of this is achieved through the transfer of nutrients in the balage he feeds to the hinds during winter. The rest of it comes from a three-year cycle of top-dressing.

In year one, a third is top-dressed with 175 kg/ha of a Mainland Minerals fine particle fertiliser, a mix of dicalcium phosphate, elemental sulphur, trace minerals and finely ground lime. In year two, granular dicalcium phosphate or RPR and elemental sulphur is applied at 200-250 kg/ha depending on resin P and sulphur levels. If the budget allows, 500kg of ag lime is applied. In year three, nothing is applied.

Soil potassium levels are naturally high so there no need to apply any K.

“If you focus solely on applying acidic highly soluble fertilisers you risk creating sterile soils that need more and more fertiliser to maintain production.”



GOOD DIRT: David Baker is passionate about his soils and strongly believes that the microbiology of a soil is as important as its mineral content, when it comes to pasture and animal production.

“It wasn’t always like that. When I came home to the farm from Lincoln, I hated the deer. I was young and in a hurry and didn’t have the patience for them. Twenty years down the track and I love them. I think you need to love them to farm them well.”

The love is not blind, however. He’s knocked hind numbers back from the 900 or so on the farm when he and wife Emma took over management of the property. They’re running 590 at present and these will be whittled back to 500, largely for environmental reasons.

There are creeks scattered throughout the deer block. In the last few years, the Bakers have doubled-fenced most of the main creeks and put a three-pond sediment trap system in the main waterway that flows into the Tomogalak stream.

But it’s simply not affordable nor practical to fence all the small creeks off, so some land has been retired from deer and into forestry. This winter they have planted 50 ha in Douglas-fir and in the next 12 months they will be planting 30ha more. They are aiming for 100ha in forestry, some of which will offset the farm’s emissions so its carbon neutral. The balance will go into the ETS.

In recent years Baker says he’s become a lot better with environmental management.

“We follow the rules and regulations, with big buffer spaces between our crops and creeks and our sediment traps are working really well. The only issue is that deer sometimes don’t respect



NEW FOCUS: David Baker’s original management focus has changed from maximising production to getting the best bang from input bucks.

Growing quality meat

The Bakers run a terminal venison system, as well as breeding their own replacements.

A third of their hinds, which are from Forrester and Wilkins Farming bloodlines, are crossed with Fiordland wapiti bulls from Chris Carran or elk from Connemara

“I prefer the Fiordland waps, they’re hardier than the elk-type. You can use them at a higher joining rate, they come out of the rut well and their temperament is good.”

Traditionally in early May the grass growth slows down. The bulls are separated from the hinds and the fawns are weaned from the mixed age hinds.

Silver Fern Farms pays the Bakers more for the better eating quality of their prime beef cattle. David would like to see similar incentives for lamb and venison.

“In a dry year we may wean the younger hinds pre-rut. It all depends on the availability of feed.”

From late May the weaner stags are break fed on fodder beet, supplemented with lucerne baleage. After 65-75 days they are sick of fodder beet, so are shifted on to swedes. The weaner hinds move in the opposite direction, from swedes to fodder beet.

“On crop they more than maintain themselves – putting on 5-10kg over winter, with the best growth rates on the fodder beet,” Baker explains.

In late August, the weaners go onto autumn saved pasture and growth rates take off.

When the weaners leave the crops, they are replaced by the hinds that have been wintering on balage on the hill block.

“I try and leave the hinds on crop to the end of September, depending on how much of it is left. This gives hill blocks time to recover for fawning. Growth on the hills doesn’t start until 1 September normally and can be slow till late September.”

The rising one-year stags start going to the works in mid-September and the last of them are away by December 10. The last of the terminal females have gone by the end of January.

“I draft them off at 100kg normally but, if the wap-crosses are still very lean, I don’t send them to the works until they are prime. That said, some waps never get prime; they’re still very lean at 130kg, so they just go.”

This philosophy of waiting until animals get prime before slaughter has paid off with the Bakers’ beef animals. The family won the Lower South Island (Prime Beef) section of the 2022 Silver Fern Farms Pasture to Plate Awards.

Silver Fern Farms pays the Bakers more for the better eating quality of their prime beef cattle. David would like to see similar incentives for lamb and venison.

electric fences and see buffer strips as ideal places to express their natural behaviours, like wallowing,” he says with a laugh.

So far, the Bakers have not planted the riparian areas. They would like to plant some natives, to accompany the tussocks that occur there naturally, but cost is a big barrier compared to planting exotics. He’s applied for a subsidy from Environment Southland that will enable the farm to get natives at cost.

“Water quality is our biggest issue; Environment Southland are happy with what we have done and all our sediment traps. These slow down the run-off and allow most of the sediment to drop out.

“But I worry about how urban greenies would view all this work. They seem to have so much control over regulations and the goal posts keep moving. So maybe this won’t be good enough in 10 years’ time. Who knows?”

The soil on the hills is derived from rotten rock and is very fine. It’s quickly churned up by the sharp feet of deer. Intensive wintering, whether on crop or by feeding out balage on a sacrifice paddock, inevitably creates mud and sediment run-off in the Southland winter. Preventing it entirely is not possible when wintering stock outdoors.

“I tried a regenerative mix for wintering, but that wasn’t the answer. Five of the species in the mix lost their feed value before grazing time or after the first frost and production was so low after the wastage that I would have needed three times the area of crop for wintering. It is good for protecting the soil but doesn’t add up financially”.

An alternative would be to winter his deer indoors. But wintering 500-plus hinds and 450-odd weaners, won’t stack up at current venison prices.

Baker keeps a close watch on profitability. He says the business has performed well during his farming career, returning around four percent on capital, peaking at five percent in the best years. In more recent years returns have dropped to below three percent and will struggle to achieve two percent this financial year. This is a major concern.

“In Dad’s day, they had some incredibly tough times. In the 1980s profits were minimal and interest rates were high but, looking back now, they probably had the best years because they made huge capital gains.

“We haven’t seen capital growth in recent years, apart from two years ago when the value of hill country farms spiked in Southland because of demand from carbon forestry. Because of uncertainty about government policy, that demand has eased, and capital gains are no longer assured.

“In a way that’s a good thing. The country needs these farms to be earning export dollars, not locked up in a blanket of carbon forests but, if our land values are not increasing, we need to be getting a return from our investment.” ■

DEER FACTS

Is indoor wintering right for your farm?

A growing number of farmers are building wintering barns for their deer, especially for their velvetting stags.

A big driver has been the need to reduce the run-off, nutrient loss and soil damage that can be associated with intensive winter feeding. In addition, there can be significant animal welfare and management benefits.



Southland deer farmers Tony and daughter Kate Roberts outside their new wintering shed

Indoor wintering is a major investment, especially if there are no existing buildings that can be repurposed as wintering barns. Whether it stacks up economically and environmentally will depend on the circumstances of an individual farm.

Indoor wintering is the focus of the latest *Deer Fact* sheet, inserted into this edition of *Deer Industry News*.

Read it now. Then insert it in the Management for Profit section of your black *Deer Fact* ring binder for future reference.



Deer Facts are produced by DINZ as part of the P2P strategy. P2P aims to assist farmers to run profitable management systems that are recognised for their high standards of animal welfare and environmental performance.

More for longer from less

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Less crop wintering options are the end goal of an AgResearch Invermay project.



BIG QUESTION: AgResearch scientist David Stevens says the starting point for the project was "is it possible to grow less winter crop?"

AgResearch scientist David Stevens says the starting point for the MPI funded three-year project was: is it possible to grow less winter crop?

"But not only that, is it possible to grow a summer crop you can reliably take into winter and is it possible to reduce the environmental winter footprint," he says.

A crop-based system meeting the feed demands of livestock during winter and in the lead up to spring has been the

backbone of winter feeding. However, change to this traditional approach was being forced by new freshwater and animal welfare regulations leading farmers to look at how to reduce the area of winter crop grown. Some were working towards all-grass wintering, but for most it was a step to far.

"The question is what crop and pasture mix will push feed through to those crucial times bearing in mind that summer and winter feed deficits are becoming common place."

David Stevens

"The reality is that even with ample dry matter bulk in late summer, it's difficult to carry it over for feeding in winter, especially in wet and cold climates."

With deer there's the added challenge of supplying feed to match their growth needs. They have a different feed demand curve to sheep and cattle, notes Stevens, requiring bulk feed in August to boost weaner growth, and then again in November for lactating hinds.

"The question is what crop and pasture mix will push feed through to those crucial times bearing in mind that summer and winter feed deficits are becoming common place in Canterbury, Hawke's Bay, Southland and Otago."

The AgResearch project is trialing as the most likely solution "hybrid" mixes of brassica undersown with grass species. The grass acts as a "sole", covering the ground and holding the soil together. Stevens explains that the goal isn't to find a single answer but rather a range of mixes that farmers could choose from according to the soil, climate and the timing of feed deficits on their farm.

The viability of various hybrid brassica-pasture options is being trialed on six farms, including Invermay, throughout Otago and Southland. At Invermay, a 15ha area of Raphno Pallaton undersown with Italian ryegrass, prairie grass, plantain and red and white clover has struck the right notes. Pallaton raphno was a relatively new option and first season indications are that it's well suited to the Invermay environment with the radish-kale brassica out-performing other multi-graze brassicas.

The blocks at Invermay were sprayed with glyphosate six weeks before direct drilling to help reserve moisture. They were sprayed



BEFORE: The crop in January before grazing.



AFTER: The crop in July after multiple grazing.

again immediately before drilling half the area in mid-November, and the rest in mid-December. The split sowings created a decent rotation for the deer to move around, Stevens says.

The initial grazing was in mid-January by first-calving R3 hinds. They grazed the underplanted grasses until they developed a taste for raphno and spent a month on the crop. The crop was grazed again in summer, then throughout June and July with a range of deer. The raphno was slightly unpalatable at the start of winter, but the crop was mostly cleaned up by the end of July. The run out crop will be renewed or stitched with pasture where possible.

Invermay trial sowing rates and fertiliser (per ha)

250 kg Cropzeal	2 kg red clover
7 kg Italian ryegrass	2 kg plantain
6 kg prairie grass	5 kg raphno
2 kg white clover	

On reflection and next steps

Although pleased with crop production and persistence Stevens says that a strict rotation from the outset, rather than the lengthy period of set stocking would probably have helped with growth and plant recovery. Also, the underplanted pasture was sparse and patchy in places and partially reflective of the prairie grass which didn't perform as expected.

Detailed liveweight gains and comparison of the raphno-based pasture with a pure pasture grazing were not kept. However a big picture comparison during lactation feeding of AI mated hinds and calves grazed on pasture and mixed-age backup hinds and calves showed the raphno-grazed progeny achieved higher daily growth rates (332 vs 493 grams) and the body condition of the raphno hinds was higher (3.92 vs 3.35). Stevens points however that the AI hinds calved about two weeks earlier than the hinds on the Raphno so the results were more of an "observation in time" and a broad indicator of success.

Another 15ha of raphno undersown with a predominantly Italian ryegrass and red clover mix will be drilled in spring. The area will again be grazed by hinds and calves over summer, and various deer over winter. Meanwhile brassica-based summer-to-winter forage trials will continue on partner farms in Otago and Southland.



PALATABLE : Invermay hinds and progeny wintered well on Pallaton.

Steps to a less-crop wintering system with deer

- Identify feed gaps over the year
- Quantify the amount of feed needed to fill those feed gaps, drawing on experience of
- past grown winter crops
- Know your soil type and rainfall, this will help with the timing of crop establishment
- As a guide, spray out old pasture/crop six to eight weeks before drilling
- Stage sowing a month or six weeks apart to create a rotation
- Remember that reducing the area of winter crops will require a review of the wider livestock and feeding system

Yeah-No

A hybrid brassica/pasture multi-graze wintering system for deer is in the too hard basket at Pamu's Mararoa Station. Manager Matt Canton has successfully bedded in all-grass wintering for the 13,000 ewe flock. It took four years from inception of the idea, to modelling, trialing and final rollout in winter 2019. Buoyed by that success he looked at how to introduce pasture-based wintering to Mararoa's cattle and deer. Winter deer feeding is a traditionally based 90 – 100 day swede and balage system but in 2021, as a trial project for the AgResearch wintering with less-crop project, weaner growth was compared on swedes versus turnips undersown with Italian ryegrass. Over early winter the growth rate average of the 400 weaners back fenced on the crop exceeded their traditionally grazed counterparts, but overall winter growth rates were similar.

"It was challenging because there was a lot of pacing once the pasture was dirty, and the reality is that in Southland once it gets wet it stays wet, and it creates problems," Canton says.

The end result was pasture damage and depletion of the plant population to the point where the ryegrass was redrilled in December. In retrospect an extra 40 - 45% area would be needed for the system to work with deer but that wasn't a feasible option. But there's been ongoing developments with Mararoa cattle. This year the in-calf heifers were break-fed without back-fencing on grass and hay on an older pasture. Both the paddock and heifers have wintered well which was encouraging, Canton says. Meanwhile the 3750 hinds and 3000 weaners spent the winter on swedes supplemented with ad-lib balage in feeders.

Canton emphasizes that less crop wintering or multi-graze feeding requires year-round adjustment of feed and stock management.

"It's not just about the winter."

He says there could be an opportunity to revisit a multi-graze, hybrid crop system for deer given the changing regulations about where and how winter crops are grown and managed. But in the meantime they'll spend the winter happy and settled on swedes.

"Crop is still a very useful tool and we need to keep working away to mitigate any environmental and animal welfare concerns to achieve good outcomes for all." ■

A Journal of New Zealand Grasslands 83: 123-134 (2021) paper 'Farming with reduced winter cropping in southern New Zealand: the risks and practicalities' explains Mararoa's experience of reduced winter cropping.

Velvetting: lessons learned

Richard Hilson

From October to January every year, much of my time in practice involved velvetting for clients and on our own farm. Having velvetted at least 150,000 stags myself in the last 30 years or so, maybe it is worth reflecting on some lessons learned.

Firstly, anyone can improve their system to make it cleaner, faster, quieter, safer. Given the value in the product, many deer farmers are surprisingly reluctant to do serious shed upgrades. Think new wall coverings such as polyurethane on ply, or rubber matting in high use areas, or better bird-proofing, or decent shelves in the freezer, or overhead external yard sprinklers, or a grunty wash down pump. Also, what about better record keeping (those NAIT tags put to one good use at least) with a reader and electronic scales in the shed?

Anyone can improve their system to make it cleaner, faster, quieter, safer. Given the value in the product, many deer farmers are surprisingly reluctant to do serious shed upgrades."

Richard Hilson

Secondly, really understand the time of cutting. Button drafting sure helps as it gets mobs aligned better, as an aside this is often an excellent time to do some tick control. In our region, we saw the explosion of tick nymphs in late August and early September, so button drafting could be a good time to check and get real bang-for-bucks from spray or pour-on treatment.

Many clients who cut velvet on their own, without second opinions, will cut it several days too early. That could be rich coming from me as I am often accused by our buyer of pushing it a bit much, but there is \$10 a day growing on a 4.5kg head and fifty bucks missed if you cut it five days early. I am yet to be convinced that early cutting is made up for by more regrowth as that is tied more to the age of the stag and the length of time until the longest day.

I have a saying that was nearly always correct – "if in doubt, chuck it out". If you don't think that it is quite ready for cutting, it won't go OG in another three or four days. Not convinced? Put a spray mark on the rump of those stags and have a look at them later in the week, get a handle on what is possible.

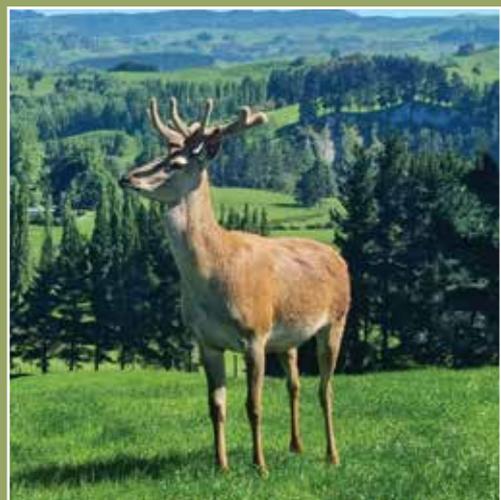
Don't overreact about parapox in velvet. I would not race in and cut all the velvet. In most cases the outbreak will be in a younger age group, usually late cut two-year-olds or a mob of spikers. Cases with severe antler damage or systemic reactions such as swollen faces do need attention, but most are going to heal. Do make sure you know where the risk is on the farm that season so other young stock don't have heightened risk of infection and do be very careful with hygiene from mob to mob. Get good veterinary advice.

Do those random jobs when the stags are in the crush or sedated. A good example is replacing EID or visual tags while the stags are in front of you, so have spare tags (make sure they are registered!) and a tagger in the shed. We often saw sires that were lame, so

figure that into the velvetting job. Some stags that are lame in the winter need two manicures to get things tidied up so making use of the first cut and regrowth events is a better bet than two additional trips to the yards. I am not a big believer in the need for copper, but a copper bullet into stags can be better in January at regrowth than May when he would rather kill you. Do make sure they can swallow though, don't try this in heavily sedated stags.

Finally, do keep a genuine close eye on the stags afterwards. In my experience, including with our stags at home, when stags are ignored for too long in recovery the risk of death is increased. When an effort is made to check them straight after the shed is washed down, to ensure they are up or sitting up, plus another look in a few hours, deaths are rare. Note that I am talking about sedated stags, as that is pretty much all I ever did. Remember that they have poorly oxygenated blood when sedated and also have a reduced ability to regulate their temperature, so overheating and poor posture (lying down in odd positions) make for bad outcomes. Get them up and moving quietly.

Richard Hilson is a Hawke's Bay farmer and vet. ■



**Annual 2yr sire stag sale Wednesday 13 December
1:30pm at 37 Pukenua Rd, Taihape**

- 35 stags with 12mth BVs +29 to +35.7kg.
- Highest average 12mth BV stag auction in NZ since 2011.
- Maternal reds selected on temperament and fully guaranteed.
- Auction on Bidr and freight paid.

For further information contact Paul Hughes:
027 446 6309 • www.deerstud.nz

NVSB and velvetting reminders

Practical

Most of these are common sense, but remember MPI now regularly tests velvet for drug residues. This is why keeping stags calm and good tourniquet practices are so important.

- Give stags enough time to settle after yarding, to minimise stress before velvetting.
- Apply a tight tourniquet to the pedicles before administering local anaesthetic. If this can't be done, then the velvet must not be sold for human consumption. It's as simple as that.
- Go through the NVSB Manual and be familiar with all its requirements, including those on diseases of velvet, locations of nerves and contingency responses.
- Practise good needle and drug hygiene. Best practice is to use a new needle for each stag.
- Make sure you can reverse chemical restraint safely. Talk to your supervising veterinarian if you have any concerns in this area.
- Make sure any blood loss is under control before removing tourniquets. If using physical restraint, check that the pressure on the stag is not too great, as this can make the problem worse.
- Let stags recover in a quiet paddock with good shade, plenty of food and clean water. Avoid locations close to a road or footpath, as this can increase stress and lead to unwanted outcomes.

Regulatory

- Keep deer sheds clean when velvetting.
- Disinfect velvet removal instruments between stags.
- Check that freezers used to store velvet can maintain a minimum ambient temperature of -15oC (lower is better) and that they contain only velvet.
- Tag all velvet intended for human consumption with official

VelTrak tags. If velvet won't securely hold a tag, e.g. spiker or regrowth, then put it in a bag and tag the bag.

Only registered veterinarians or certified velvetters are legally allowed to remove deer velvet and use VelTrak tags. If you are not certified to remove deer velvet or have a deer shed that needs auditing for compliance with the Regulated Control Scheme, please contact DINZ on 04 473 4500. ■

COMPLETE YOUR VSD!

A VSD is a legal declaration that the velvet has been removed in accordance with hygiene and animal welfare requirements. Selling velvet without an approved VSD in place puts the entire velvet industry at risk. It also places you at risk of prosecution under the Animal Products Act 1999.

You do not have to wait for an email to approve your VSD. You can log in to VelTrak at any time and see if there are any waiting for you. Approving a VSD quickly makes life easier for everyone else in the velvet supply chain, including buyers, processors and ultimately the customers that are using it.

The current system for raising and approving Velvet Status Declarations (VSDs) has not changed this season. This means that buyers will still need to raise a VSD for each consignment of velvet they collect, and farmers will need to approve them before the velvet can move to the next stage in the chain. Log into VelTrak (veltrak.velvet.org.nz) and check that your business details, including your veterinary practice, are correct.

Forest Road Farm – NZ Red Deer

Rising to the challenges of 2023 and beyond

We thought the last three years had been challenging with droughts, Covid and market disruption, but they all seem to pale in comparison after being beaten up by Cyclone Gabrielle and the relentless rain that followed. That said, we have been busy, fixing things up. Our road access is partially sorted, and we are just left with the scars as a constant reminder!

At Forest Road Farm we have always prided ourselves on breeding tidy, correct, heavy beamed velvet with a strong emphasis on body size, constitution and temperament. We continue to invest in genetics that progress these traits and last season purchased three new sires: Hedricks (12.0kg @ 3yr) and Irwin (7.8kg SAP @ 3yr) from Tayles Deer; and McLeod (6.43kg @ 2yr) Lot 1 from Arawata. We all know how heritable velvet traits are, so having these new genetics across our proven sire lines is extremely exciting for us.

This year's sale will see the first three-year-old sons by Lazarus come to market. Lazarus cut 13.05kg SAP @ 5yrs. He is breeding extremely tidy velvet and it will be a pleasure to present his sons to the market.

A few years back we retained a home-bred, Amisfield, who cut 8kg @ 3

yrs. We analysed all last season's two-year-old velvet information and Amisfield came out on top with 97.5% of his two-year-old progeny retained after cutting over 4kg, with his keeper average at 4.75kg!

This year we will be selling 80-plus yearling hinds with elite velvet genetics. Some will be sold as singles and a portion sold in sire groups to suit commercial clients. These hinds represent the very latest of our breeding program and are a great way to accelerate rapid velvet genetic gains in your herd.

As a business we will continue to gauge progress by the success of our clients, through the livestock they purchase from us and how they perform in their environment.

Our passion for farming deer and the products we produce continues to grow and we believe we are well positioned to take on the challenges of the future. We look forward to welcoming new and existing clients to our seventh on farm sale in December, to share our passion for breeding and farming red deer with proven quality velvet genetics. ■

Advertorial supplied.

Water-fed research

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Fencing off waterways and wetlands isn't always the optimal way to protect and enhance freshwater ecosystems in hill- and high-country environments. A "one-size-fit-all" approach is not very efficient in dealing with complex and variable systems, and "dynamic" is a word used frequently by AgResearch scientist and project leader Bryan Thompson to describe these waterways and their impacts on water quality and stream health.



IT'S COMPLICATED: AgResearch scientist Bryan Thompson says the dynamic nature of hill- and high-country waterways makes it difficult to make good decisions on the best mitigation option.

A five-year project funded by DINZ and AgResearch looked at the water quality and stream health on 10 hill- and high-country deer farms around the country. Initial analysis of this substantial dataset show that waterways are a dynamic force and their ebb and flow, and nitrate, phosphorous, E. coli and sediment levels vary within seasons and over time. This variability makes it difficult to make good

decisions on mitigation options, particularly if there are only a couple of water quality sample results available, Thompson explains.

"It's very complicated to know what to do and there are no blanket rules that can be applied."

"Once you have water quality measures over time you can make an informed decision on how to mitigate or have science-backed information for discussions with regional councils and regulators."

Bryan Thompson

He uses as an example a water spring in hill-country which could be dormant for most of the year or even several seasons but then after heavy rain became a torrent ponding in a critical source area for a short period of time. Another more common example is deciding on the placement of perimeter fencing to exclude stock from a wetland area. It can be a difficult (and costly) decision given that the wetland area could vary markedly between a wet and dry season. A better management approach could be less exclusion fencing and more nuanced and monitored grazing according to stock class and seasonal conditions, Thompson said.

DINZ science and policy manager Emil Murphy says the research findings are an important piece in the freshwater jigsaw puzzle. There are still a number of missing pieces such as what defines water quality and how best to measure it on farm. DINZ will be including relevant data from the research in discussions with government policy makers and regulators, and at a regional level advocating for greater farmer-lead management of waterways.

"A healthy waterway ecosystem is the beginning and end point of freshwater policy and planning," Murphy says.

Farmers could start at that same end point in developing their freshwater plan and describe the steps they would take and the tools they would use to verify progress and success, he says. Those tools and other key findings from Thompson's research will be shared with farmers, catchment and industry groups over the coming year through field days and various media. In the meantime Thompson says farmers could "get to know your impact" on waterways through measurement and recording.

"Once you have water quality measures over time you can make an informed decision on how to mitigate or have science-backed information for discussions with regional councils and regulators." ■

41ST NATIONAL VELVET AND TROPHY ANTLER COMPETITION

JUDGING: 7th December | AWARDS NIGHT: 8th December

NZDFA
SOUTHLAND BRANCH

Jane Campbell, Entries and Events Coordinator
027 347 8926 | southlanddeerbranch@gmail.com
Bruce Paterson, Competition Chairman | 027 344 3629

Measured change

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

AgResearch summer intern Nathan Silcock's 2022-23 project looked at how some basic indicators of stream health and water chemistry had changed in Invermay's main waterway since the implementation of new management practices including stock exclusion fencing, vegetation buffers and grazing management.

The study involved water sampling along the deer farm waterways at six sites using multiple methods: water chemistry samples, stream bed assessments, invertebrate collection to develop macroinvertebrate Community Index (MCI) scores, and 24 hour passive eDNA collection.

The good news was that N and E. coli levels leaving the farm were within the national threshold level. However, the levels fluctuated and were sufficiently high to warrant regular monitoring.

"Given the variation especially over summer, monthly chemical testing would be a good idea," Silcock says.

Another goal of the project was to compare new technology – environmental DNA sampling (eDNA) – with traditional sampling methods.

The eDNA testing process captures and sequences fragments of DNA that have been shed by plants and animals into the waterway. Silcock, a University of Otago Masters in freshwater ecology student, says eDNA proved to be quick and simple in comparison to the more cumbersome chemical sampling.

Silcock (Muaūpoko) whose summer project was funded by Te Puāwaitanga had hoped to develop a cultural health index measuring factors of importance to tangata whenua in the

Invermay freshwater environment. The project was to be based on one he completed for the nearby Sinclair Wetland, but time constraints meant he was unable to complete the work. He says a CHI is an opportunity and starting point to incorporate and combine Māori perspectives and values for stream health with science-backed data to make freshwater management decisions. ■



EASY AS: AgResearch summer intern Nathan Silcock says eDNA testing is quick, simple, and reliable.

Peel Forest Estate 'Forrester' genetics produce the ideal breeding hind.

Forrester replacement hinds possess all the necessary maternal traits for hardy, healthy, resilient animals, with solid growth, quiet temperament, impressive velvet genetics, and exceptional conformation.

Colin Gates, manager at Waihi Pukawa Station is running around 4000 breeding hinds located on the high country above Lake Taupo. For over nine years Colin has been purchasing Forrester sires from Peel Forest Estate, with the main objective of breeding his replacement hinds.

"Every year we are noticing a huge improvement in our hind base. Not only are the spiker progeny lifting in velvet yields, but the hinds are also handling our tough winters with ease. They are hardy, highly efficient hinds, scan extremely well, and the English bloodlines seem to really excel when the going gets tough," Gates says.

Gates also runs a large velvetting herd and incorporates Forrester sires in this line as well. This strategy serves a dual-purpose, Gates says.

"We use the Forrester stag for our velvetting operation as well,

because these hinds also produce top tier velvet stags, and when she goes over a terminal sire, the hind has all the necessary traits to get thumping progeny off to the works early". ■

Advertorial supplied.



Proof Is Truth: Melior tops AgResearch across-breed liveweight gain trial.

The growth performance of MG198/18 (Chardonnay) progeny in the recent AgResearch across-herd breeding connectedness (ABC) trial is more science-backed evidence of Melior's successful genetics programme.

Elite sire Chardonnay's progeny dominated growthbased performance results specifically:

- Heaviest red mid-October weight for both sexes, a 10.9 kg advantage over the next red sire
- Heaviest male mid-October weight for both red and wapiti
- Second highest sexual dimorphism indicating breeding efficiency - fast growing stag progeny from smaller hinds who eat less.

Tom Macfarlane and the Melior Deer team are fierce advocates of DeerSelect's estimated breed values, supplying the data every year to clients so they can make accurate and informed purchasing decisions.

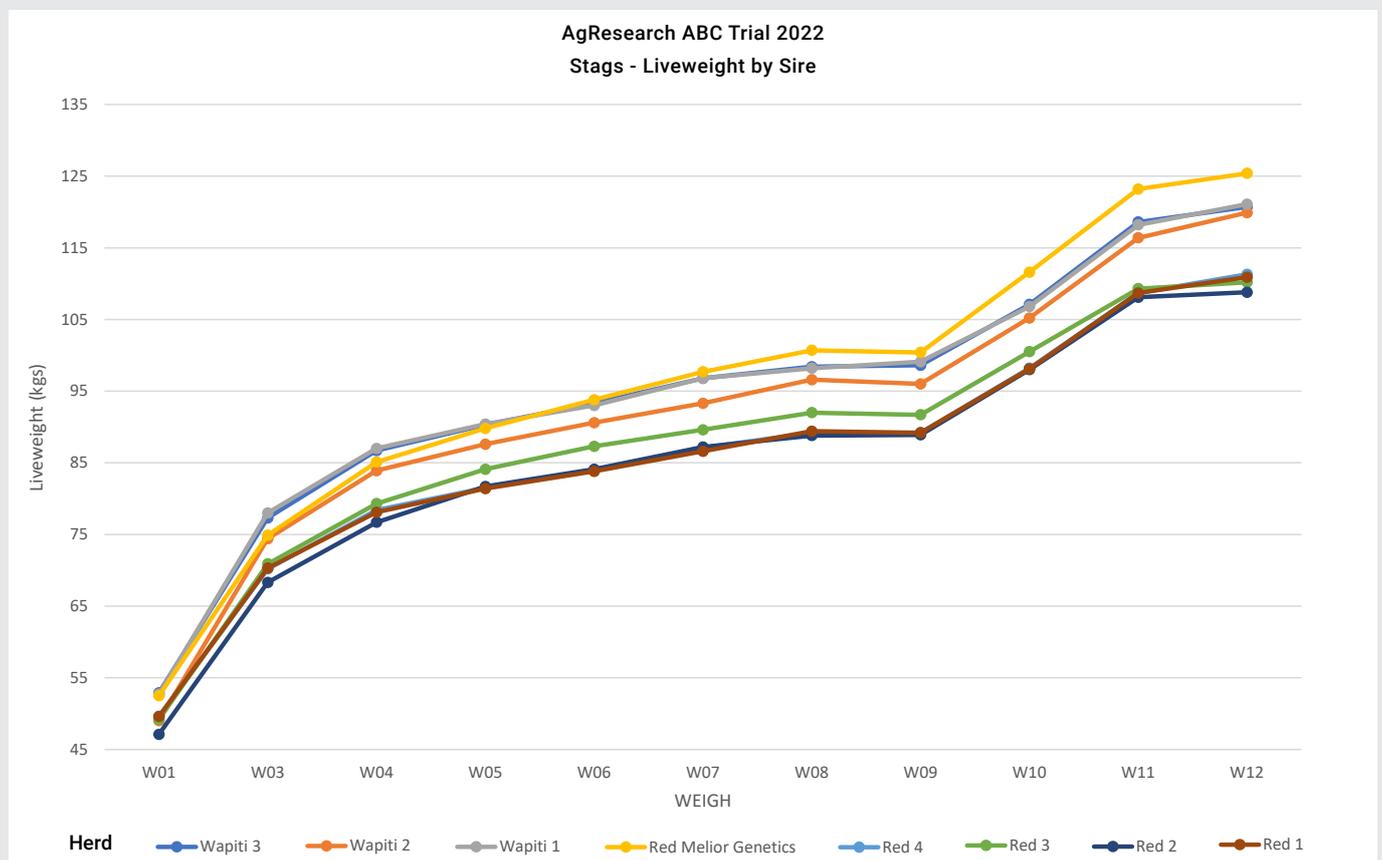
The across-herd breeding connectedness results further validate the feed efficiency and production benefits achievable with Melior.

Melior 7th In-Calf Hinds Sales Tues 4th July 1pm (Viewing and BBQ from 12). 480 Gudex Road, RD17, Fairlie. Tom MacFarlane 027 600 8555 / Murray Coutts 027 403 9377. ■

Advertorial supplied.



Elite sire Chardonnay is named after Melior geneticist Jake Chardon.





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BE PICKY ABOUT YOUR PROGENY

We want to make your future deer decisions accurate and informed ones. Let's leave the guesswork to others.

We don't do pin the tail on the donkey, blindly choosing our next generation of deer based on what we've got.

Our commercially raised Stags have been bred on hill country and we cull hard because we have large herds that give us scale. They aren't soft pampered types with a spectrum of supplements and drenches to look sparkling pre-sale.

Instead we use seasons of industry-leading BVs and data sets to support our decisions so you can make yours knowing we've done all the hard work for you. The Across Breed trial work amongst other trials at AgResearch Invermay backs this.

If you want a sound Stag with high growth rate progeny that will command higher prices if you're not finishing them yourself, we can help.

Whether you're after a fast-growth red sire that competes favourably with other terminal sires, or a maternal sire with the appropriate amount of english breeding to suit almost any farming system and environment, please get in touch.

We look forward to being able to host you on our farm in South Canterbury.



Private Sale Catalogue out in November. For more information and details please visit: www.melior.nz or call Tom on 027 600 8555 for private viewing appointments in South Canterbury.


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